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A Companion to
Hong Kong Cinema

Edited by Esther M.K. Cheung, Gina Marchetti,
and Esther C.M. Yau

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A Companion to Hong Kong Cinema

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Editorial Offices

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9600 Garsington Road, Oxford, OX4 2DQ, UK

The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, UK

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Dr. Esther Mee-kwan Cheung, a pioneering figure in the field of Hong Kong studies and an important force in research on Hong Kong film, literature, and cultural studies passed away on February 9, 2015.

This volume is dedicated to her memory.

Esther Cheung was actively involved in the editing of *A Companion to Hong Kong Cinema* from the very outset and remained an indispensable member of the editorial team. She wrote an important essay for Part I, "Critical Paradigms," and took up the editorial work for the same part as well as for Part V, "Narratives and Aesthetics."

Many months of editorial coordination and checking received assistant support through Esther Cheung's generous sharing of research funds.

The volume has been enriched by Esther's intellectual presence, wisdom, attentiveness, and generosity.

Contents

Acknowledgments	x
Notes on Contributors	xi
Foreword	xviii
<i>Ackbar Abbas</i>	
Introduction	1
<i>Esther M.K. Cheung, Gina Marchetti, and Esther C.M. Yau</i>	
Part I Critical Paradigms: Defining Hong Kong Cinema Studies	15
1 Watchful Partners, Hidden Currents: Hong Kong Cinema Moving into the Mainland of China	17
<i>Esther C.M. Yau</i>	
2 The Urban Maze: Crisis and Topography in Hong Kong Cinema	51
<i>Esther M.K. Cheung</i>	
3 Hong Kong Cinema as Ethnic Borderland	71
<i>Kwai-cheung Lo</i>	
4 Hong Kong Cinema in the Age of Neoliberalization and Mainlandization: Hong Kong SAR New Wave as a Cinema of Anxiety	89
<i>Mirana May Szeto and Yun-chung Chen</i>	
Commentary: Dimensions of Hong Kong Cinema	116
<i>Sheldon Lu</i>	
Part II Critical Geographies	121
5 Hong Kong Cinema's Exotic Others: Re-examining the Hong Kong Body in the Context of Asian Regionalism	123
<i>Olivia Khoo</i>	

6	Animating the Translocal: The McDull Films as a Cultural and Visual Expression of Hong Kong <i>Kimburley Wing-yee Choi and Steve Fore</i>	140
7	Globalizing Hong Kong Cinema Through Japan <i>David Desser</i>	168
8	Creative Cinematic Geographies Through the Hong Kong International Film Festival <i>Cindy Hing-yuk Wong</i>	185
9	Postmodernity, Han Normativity, and Hong Kong Cinema <i>Evans Chan</i>	207
	Commentary: Critical Geographies <i>Stephen Yiu-wai Chu</i>	225
Part III The Gendered Body and Queer Configurations		235
10	Feminism, Postfeminism, and Hong Kong Women Filmmakers <i>Gina Marchetti</i>	237
11	Love In The City: The Placing of Intimacy in Urban Romance Films <i>Helen Hok-sze Leung</i>	265
12	Regulating Queer Domesticity in the Neoliberal Diaspora <i>Audrey Yue</i>	284
	Commentary: To Love is to Demand: A Very Short Commentary <i>Shu-mei Shih</i>	303
Part IV Hong Kong Stars		305
13	Return of the Dragon: Handover, Hong Kong Cinema, and Chinese Ethno-nationalism <i>Paul Bowman</i>	307
14	Transitional Stardom: The Case of Jimmy Wang Yu <i>Tony Williams</i>	322
15	Camp Stars of Androgyny: A Study of Leslie Cheung and Anita Mui's Body Images of Desire <i>Natalia Siu-hung Chan</i>	341
16	Cooling Faye Wong: A Cosmopolitical Intervention <i>Kin-Yan Szeto</i>	359
	Commentary: Hong Kong Stars and Stardom <i>Gary Bettinson</i>	379

Part V Narratives and Aesthetics	389
17 Making Merry on Time: A Feast of Nostalgia in Watching Chinese New Year Films <i>Fiona Yuk-wa Law</i>	391
18 A Pan-Asian Cinema of Allusion: <i>Going Home</i> and <i>Dumplings</i> <i>Bliss Cua Lim</i>	410
19 Double Agents, Cameos, and the Poor Man's Orchestra: Music and Place in <i>Chungking Express</i> <i>Giorgio Biancorosso</i>	440
20 Documenting Sentiments in Video Diaries around 1997: Archeology of Forgotten Screen Practices <i>Linda Chiu-han Lai</i>	462
Commentary: The Dynamics of Off-Centeredness in Hong Kong Cinema <i>Yingjin Zhang</i>	489
Part VI Screen Histories and Documentary Practices	499
21 The Lightness of History: Screening the Past in Hong Kong Cinema <i>Vivian P.Y. Lee</i>	501
22 The Tales of Fang Peilin and Zhu Shilin: From Rethinking Hong Kong Cinema to Rewriting Chinese Film History <i>Ain-ling Wong</i>	523
23 The Documentary Film in Hong Kong <i>Ian Aitken and Mike Ingham</i>	539
24 Representations of Law in Hong Kong Cinema <i>Marco Wan</i>	560
Commentary: Cinema and the Cultural Politics of Identity: Hong Kong No More? A Commentary on the Verge of Postcolonial Locality <i>Stephen Ching-kiu Chan</i>	577
Filmography	585
Index	602

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Notes on Contributors

Ackbar Abbas is professor of comparative literature at UC Irvine, USA, and author of *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance* (1997).

Ian Aitken is a professor of film studies in the Academy of Film, School of Communications, Hong Kong Baptist University. His research interests lie in the fields of documentary film studies and realist film theory. He is the author of, amongst others, *Hong Kong Documentary Film* (co-author, 2014), *Lukácsian Film Theory and Cinema* (2012), *Realist Film Theory and Cinema* (2006), and *Film and Reform: John Grierson and the Documentary Film Movement* (1990, 1992, 2013). He is also the editor of *The Concise Routledge Encyclopedia of the Documentary Film* (2013).

Gary Bettinson is Lecturer in Film Studies at Lancaster University, UK. He is the author of *The Sensuous Cinema of Wong Kar-wai* (2015), editor of *Directory of World Cinema: China* Volume 1 (2012) and 2 (2014), and co-author of *What is Film Theory?* (2010).

Giorgio Biancorosso is Associate Professor in Musicology at The University of Hong Kong, where he teaches courses on film music and sound, musical aesthetics, and opera. He has recently published “Songs of Delusion: Popular Music and the Aesthetics of the Self in Wong Kar-wai’s Cinema” in *Popular Music and the New Auteur: Visionary Filmmakers after MTV* (2013) and “Memory and the Leitmotif in the Cinema” in *Representation in Western Music* (2013). His monograph *Situated Listening: Music and the Representation of the Attention in the Cinema* is forthcoming with Oxford University Press.

Paul Bowman (Cardiff University) is the author of *Martial Arts Studies: Disrupting Disciplinary Boundaries* (2015), *Reading Rey Chow: Visuality, Postcoloniality, Ethnicity, Sexuality* (2013), *Beyond Bruce Lee: Chasing the Dragon through Film, Philosophy and Popular Culture* (2013), *Culture and the Media* (2012), *Theorizing Bruce Lee: Film-Fantasy-Fighting-Philosophy* (2010), *Deconstructing Popular Culture* (2008), and *Post-Marxism versus Cultural Studies: Theory, Politics and Intervention* (2007). He is editor of numerous books and

journal issues, including *Rancière and Film* (2013), *Reading Rancière: Critical Dissensus* (2011), *The Rey Chow Reader* (2010), and *The Truth of Žižek* (2006).

Evans Chan is a critic, playwright, and one of Hong Kong's leading independent filmmakers. He has made four narrative features and eight documentaries, including *To Liv(e)*, *Journey to Beijing*, *Sorceress of the New Piano*, and *Datong: The Great Society*. His latest documentary is *The Name of the Rose: Writing Hong Kong*. Chan has published three books of essays in Chinese, and is the editor/translator into Chinese of three books by Susan Sontag. His writings have appeared in *Cinemaya*, *Asian Cinema*, *Film International*, *Postmodern Culture*, *Critique*, and various anthologies. He is the librettist for the opera, *Datong: The Chinese Utopia*, premiered at the 2015 Hong Kong Arts Festival. *Postcolonialism, Diaspora, and Alternative Histories*, a critical anthology about Chan's works, edited by Tony Williams, is forthcoming from the Hong Kong University Press.

Natalia Siu-hung Chan (Pseudonym: Lok Fung) is a poet, cultural critic, and has a Ph.D in Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies from the University of California, San Diego, USA. She is also the guest anchor of the RTHK's radio program of performing arts in Hong Kong. Research interests include cultural and film theory, gender studies, popular culture, performance studies, cross-dressing and fashion. Her recent publications in Chinese include *Flying Coffin*, which received the 9th Biennial Awards for Chinese Literature (Poetry) in 2007, and *Butterfly of Forbidden Colors: The Artistic Image of Leslie Cheung*, which received the Hong Kong Book Prize as well as "The Best Book of the Year" in 2008.

Stephen Ching-kiu Chan is Professor of Cultural Studies, Associate Vice President (Academic Affairs) and Registrar, and Director of Core Curriculum and General Education at Lingnan University, Hong Kong. He is the co-editor of *Contemporary East Asia Cities: New Cultural and Ideological Formations* (2008), *Hong Kong Connections: Transnational Imagination in Action Cinema* (2005), *Hong Kong Un-Imagined: History, Culture and the Future* (1997), and the editor of *Cultural Imaginary and Ideology: Critical Essays in Contemporary Hong Kong Cultural Politics* (1997). He has published journal articles in *Cultural Studies* and *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, and the chapter entitled "Film Education in Hong Kong: New Challenges and Opportunities" in *The Education of the Filmmaker in Europe, Australia and Asia* (2013).

Yun-chung Chen has a Ph.D. in Urban Planning from UCLA, and is Associate Professor, Department of Cultural Studies, Lingnan University, Hong Kong. His current research interests include innovation studies, culture-creative industries, and neoliberal urban redevelopment. He has published in *Journal of Chinese Cinemas*, *Journal of Development Studies*, *Journal of Economic Geography*, *China Review*, *China Information*, *International Journal of Technology and Globalization*, *Pacific Affairs* etc., and in volumes like *Neoliberalism and Global Cinema* (2011) and *Urban and Regional Development Trajectories in Contemporary Capitalism* (2013).

Esther M.K. Cheung taught in the Department of Comparative Literature at the University of Hong Kong (HKU). Having chaired the Department from 2007 to 2014, she was Director of the Center for the Study of Globalization and Cultures at HKU. Author of *Fruit Chan's Made in Hong Kong* (2009) and *In Pursuit of Independent Visions in Hong Kong Cinema* (2010), she was also editor and co-editor of several anthologies on Hong Kong film and literature including *Between Home and World: A Reader in Hong Kong Cinema* (2004), *Hong Kong Screenscapes: From the New Wave to the Digital Edge* (2011) as well as *City at the End of Time: Poems by Leung Ping-kwan* (2012).

Kimburley Wing-yee Choi is Assistant Professor in the School of Creative Media at the City University of Hong Kong, where she teaches cultural studies, visual ethnography, and film history. She is currently conducting a visual ethnographic research project on the relationship between family play and class reproduction, and another on Tai Hang domestic space. She is the author of articles in *Cultural Studies Review*, *Social Semiotics*, and *Urban Studies*, and is the author of *Remade in Hong Kong: How Hong Kong People Use Hong Kong Disneyland* (2010), and the co-editor of *World Film Locations: Hong Kong* (2013).

Stephen Yiu-wai Chu is Professor and Director of Hong Kong Studies Programme, School of Modern Languages and Cultures, The University of Hong Kong. His research interests focus on Hong Kong culture, postcolonialism, and globalization. He has published more than 20 books, including the most recent *Lost in Transition: Hong Kong Culture in the Age of China* (2013). He has also published widely in journals of different academic disciplines such as literature, film, popular music, cultural policy, anthropology, sociology, and legal studies.

David Desser is Professor Emeritus of Cinema Studies, University of Illinois, USA. He is the author of *The Samurai Films of Akira Kurosawa* (1983) and *Eros Plus Massacre: An Introduction to the Japanese New Wave Cinema* (1988); the editor of *Ozu's Tokyo Story* (1997) and co-editor of *The Cinema of Hong Kong: History, Arts, Identity* (2000), *Reframing Japanese Cinema: Authorship, Genre, History* (1992), and *Cinematic Landscapes: Observations on the Visual Arts of Cinema of China and Japan* (1994). He has published numerous essays in scholarly collections and journals and did DVD commentary for the Criterion Edition of *Tokyo Story* and *Seven Samurai*. He is a former editor of *Cinema Journal*, and of *The Journal of Japanese and Korean Cinema*.

Steve Fore works in the School of Creative Media at the City University of Hong Kong, where he teaches in areas of animation studies, culture and technology studies, “new” and “old” media theory and history, surveillance studies, and documentary media. His current research is concerned with the ways in which animation artists have negotiated a relationship with the ongoing technological transformations of their creative form. In addition, he has written extensively on

Hong Kong and Chinese cinema, including essays on Jackie Chan, Clara Law, and Chinese rock and roll movies.

Mike Ingham teaches drama, film, and literature in the English Department at Lingnan University. Film-related publications include *Hong Kong – A Cultural and Literary History* in the *City of the Imagination* series (2007), *Johnnie To's PTU* in the New Hong Kong Cinema Series (2009), "Hong Kong Cinema and the Film Essay: A Matter of Perception" in *Hong Kong Screenscapes: From the New Wave to the Digital Frontier* (2010), "History in the Making: Allegory, History, Fiction and Chow Yun-fat in the 1980s Hong Kong Films *Hong Kong 1941* and *Love in a Fallen City*" in *Screening the Past* Vol. 24, *Journal of History and Cinema* (2009), "Twenty Years On: Hong Kong Dissident Documentarians and the Tiananmen Factor" in *Studies in Documentary Film*, Vol. 6, no. 1 and *Hong Kong Documentary Film* (with Ian Aitken, 2014).

Olivia Khoo is a Senior Lecturer in Film and Screen Studies at Monash University, Australia. She is the author of *The Chinese Exotic: Modern Diasporic Femininity* (2007), co-author of *Transnational Australian Cinema: Ethics in the Asian Diasporas* (2013), and co-editor of *Futures of Chinese Cinema: Technologies and Temporalities in Chinese Screen Cultures* (2009), and of *Sinophone Cinemas* (2014).

Linda Chiu-han Lai is Associate Professor at the City University of Hong Kong's School of Creative Media (SCM). Published academically on Hong Kong and Chinese cinema, she is also a writer on contemporary and new media art. She is also a research-based interdisciplinary artist. Her experimental videography and installation works have been shown in key short film, documentary, and experimental film/video festivals in Europe, Asia, and USA. Her academic/artistic research focuses on historiography, visual ethnography, and media archaeology. At SCM, she teaches contemporary and media art, critical theory and socially engaged practices, videography, visual ethnography, and narrative experimentation. She co-edited *World Film Location Hong Kong* (2013).

Fiona Yuk-wa Law is a lecturer at the Department of Comparative Literature, The University of Hong Kong. Her research interests include Hong Kong cinema and cultural studies, Asian cinemas, global cinematic circulation, cinematic nostalgia, visual cultures, animal studies, affect and aesthetics. Her previous publications include a Chinese article on *Center Stage* and *Rouge* in *In Critical Proximity: The Visual Memories of Stanley Kwan* (2007) and an article on Chinese New Year films in the 1950s and 1960s in *Journal of Chinese Cinemas* (2010).

Vivian P.Y. Lee is Associate Professor at the City University of Hong Kong. She teaches and researches on Chinese and East Asian cinemas, visual cultures, critical theory, and Hong Kong culture. Her work on Chinese and East Asian cinemas has appeared in academic journals and anthologies. She is the author of *Hong Kong*

Cinema Since 1997: the Post-nostalgic Imagination (2009) and editor of *East Asian Cinemas: Regional Flows and Global Transformations* (2011).

Helen Hok-sze Leung is Associate Professor of Gender, Sexuality & Women's Studies at Simon Fraser University, Canada. She is the author of *Undercurrents: Queer Culture and Postcolonial Hong Kong* (2008) and *Farewell My Concubine: A Queer Film Classic* (2010). She is a co-editor of the Queer Asia Book Series (Hong Kong UP) and serves on the editorial boards of *Journal of Chinese Cinemas* (Intellect) and *Transgender Studies Quarterly* (Duke UP).

Bliss Cua Lim is Associate Professor of Film and Media Studies and Visual Studies at the University of California, Irvine, USA. She is the author of *Translating Time: Cinema, the Fantastic and Temporal Critique* (2009). Her research and teaching center on cinematic and queer temporality, Philippine cinema, postcolonial feminist theory, and transnational horror and the fantastic. She is currently working on the crises of archival preservation in Philippine cinema.

Kwai-cheung Lo is a Professor in the Department of Humanities and Creative Writing, and Director of Creative and Professional Writing Program at Hong Kong Baptist University. He is the author of *Excess and Masculinity in Asian Cultural Productions* (2010) and *Chinese Face / Off: The Transnational Popular Culture of Hong Kong* (2005). Also a creative writer in Chinese language, his Chinese publications include short stories, poems, interviews, play scripts, cultural and literary criticisms. Currently he is working on a book manuscript of ethnic minority cinema in China, and a research project on Asianism.

Sheldon Lu is Professor of Comparative Literature at the University of California, Davis, USA. He is the author of numerous publications, including *From Historicity to Fictionality: The Chinese Poetics of Narrative* (1994), *China, Transnational Visuality, Global Postmodernity* (2001), *Chinese Modernity and Global Biopolitics: Studies in Chinese Literature and Visual Culture* (2007). He is the editor of *Transnational Chinese Cinemas: Identity, Nationhood, Gender* (1997), co-editor of *Chinese-Language Film: Historiography, Poetics, Politics* (2005), co-editor of *Chinese Ecocinema in the Age of Environmental Challenge* (2009).

Gina Marchetti works at the University of Hong Kong. Her books include *Romance and the "Yellow Peril": Race, Sex and Discursive Strategies in Hollywood Fiction* (1993), *Andrew Lau and Alan Mak's Infernal Affairs The Trilogy* (2007), *From Tian'anmen to Times Square: Transnational China and the Chinese Diaspora on Global Screens* (2006), and *The Chinese Diaspora on American Screens: Race, Sex, and Cinema* (2012). She has co-edited *Hong Kong Film, Hollywood and the New Global Cinema* (2007), *Chinese Connections: Critical Perspectives on Film, Identity and Diaspora* (2009), and, most recently, *Hong Kong Screenscapes: From the New Wave to the Digital Frontier* (2011).

Shu-mei Shih is the Hon-yin and Suet-fong Chan Professor of Chinese at the University of Hong Kong and Professor of Comparative Literature, Asian Languages and Cultures, and Asian American Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles, USA. She is the author of *The Lure of the Modern: Writing Modernism in Semicolonial China, 1917-1937* (2001) and *Visuality and Identity: Sinophone Articulations across the Pacific* (2007), and the co-editor of *Minor Transnationalism* (2005), *The Creolization of Theory* (2011), and *Sinophone Studies: A Critical Reader* (2013).

Kin-Yan Szeto, Ph.D. (Northwestern University) is Associate Professor of Theatre and Dance at Appalachian State University, USA, and is the author of *The Martial Arts Cinema of the Chinese Diaspora: Ang Lee, John Woo, and Jackie Chan in Hollywood* (2011). Her publications have appeared in Oxford Bibliographies, Routledge Advances in Film Studies, *Visual Anthropology*, *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture*, *Dance Chronicle*, *Jump Cut*, and elsewhere. Szeto serves on the Executive Board for the Congress on Research in Dance. In addition to her scholarly work, Szeto is a theater director and choreographer.

Mirana May Szeto has a Ph.D. in Comparative Literature from UCLA and is Assistant Professor in Comparative Literature, University of Hong Kong. She writes on critical theory, cinema, literature, coloniality, cultural politics and policy in China, Hong Kong, Taiwan. She publishes in journals like *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* (2006), *Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies* (2009), *Journal of Chinese Cinemas* (2012), and volumes like *Neoliberalism and Global Cinema* (2011), *Hong Kong Screenscapes* (2011), *Sinophone Studies: A Critical Reader* (2013), *Sinophone Cinemas* (2014). Her book project is on *Hong Kong SAR New Wave Cinema in the Age of Mainlandization*.

Marco Wan is Associate Professor of Law and Honorary Associate Professor of English at the University of Hong Kong. He has published extensively on law and visuality in Asia.

Tony Williams is Professor and Area Head of Film Studies in the Department of English of Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, USA. He is a frequent contributor to *Asian Cinema* and is currently editing a collection of essays on the writer-critic-director Evans Chan for Hong Kong University Press as well as working on second editions of *Hearths of Darkness: The Family in the American Horror Film* (1996) and *Larry Cohen: Radical; Allegories of an American Filmmaker* (1997).

Ain-ling Wong is a film critic and researcher. Previously Head of Film Programming at Hong Kong Arts Centre (1987–1990), Programmer of Asian Cinema at Hong Kong International Film Festival (1990–1996), and Research Officer at Hong Kong Film Archive (2001–2009). She is the author of *Xi Yuan*

(2000) and Meng Yu Shuo Meng (2012), and editor of *Fei Mu – Poet Director* (1998), *The Cathay Story* (2002), *The Shaw Screen: A Preliminary Study* (2003), *The Hong Kong / Guangdong Film Connection* (2005), *The Glorious Modernity of Kong Ngee* (2006), *Zhu Shilin: A Filmmaker of His Times* (2009), and *Fei Mu's Confucius* (2010), among others.

Cindy Hing-yuk Wong is Professor of Communications at the College of Staten Island, City University of New York, USA. Her areas of research include film festivals, Hong Kong cinema culture and practices, diasporic media. Her book, *Film Festivals: Culture, People, and Power on the Global Screen* (2011), offers the first comprehensive overview of the global festival world. She is the co-author of *Global Hong Kong* and the co-editor of the *Encyclopedia of Contemporary American Culture*; she has published in *Asian Cinema*, *American Anthropologist* and contributed chapters to *Chinese TV*, *Hong Kong Films*, *Hollywood and the New Global Cinema*, *TV China*.

Esther C.M. Yau teaches in the Department of Comparative Literature at the University of Hong Kong. She has published essays in *The Cinema Journal*, *Film Quarterly*, *The Oxford History of World Cinema*, *Discourse*, *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, *Wide Angle*, *Dangdai Dianying*, *Jintian*, and *World Cinema*. She has recently published in *Hong Kong Screenscapes: From the New Wave to the Digital Frontier* (2011) and *Chinese Connections: Critical Perspectives on Film, Identity and Diaspora* (2009). She has co-edited "Asia/Pacific: a Spectral Surface" – a special issue of *positions: Asia critique*. She is the editor of *At Full Speed: Hong Kong Cinema in a Borderless World* (2001) and co-editor of *New Chinese Cinemas: Forms, Identities, Politics* (1994).

Audrey Yue is Associate Professor in Screen and Cultural Studies at the University of Melbourne, Australia. Her publications include *Sinophone Cinema* (2014), *Transnational Australian Cinema: Ethics in the Diasporas* (2013), *Queer Singapore: Illiberal Citizenship and Mediated Cultures* (2012), and *Ann Hui's Song of the Exile* (2010).

Yingjin Zhang is Professor of Chinese Studies and Chair of the Department of Literature at University of California, San Diego, USA and Visiting Chair Professor of Humanities at Shanghai Jiaotong University, China. His English books include *The City in Modern Chinese Literature and Film* (1996), *Encyclopedia of Chinese Film* (1998), *China in a Polycentric World* (1998), *Cinema and Urban Culture in Shanghai* (1999), *Screening China* (2002), *Chinese National Cinema* (2004), *From Underground to Independent* (2006), *Cinema, Space, and Polylocality in a Globalizing China* (2010), *Chinese Film Stars* (2010), *A Companion to Chinese Cinema* (2012), *Liangyou, Kaleidoscopic Modernity and the Shanghai Global Metropolis* (2013), *New Chinese-Language Documentaries* (2015), and *A Companion to Modern Chinese Literature* (2015).

Foreword

Ackbar Abbas

This landmark *Companion to Hong Kong Cinema* is a genuinely collaborative effort, building on and extending the critical and scholarly work done in the past two decades. One of its chief collaborators is the city itself. Hong Kong cinema we might say grew out of an attempt to engage with and respond to the city's complex and paradoxical history. Or we might say the exact opposite: that it grew out of an attempt to ignore and forget an all-too-pressing history by providing distraction and simple entertainment. In either case, the city remains an elusive presence whose effects we can feel even before we understand their causes.

The editors of this volume aptly remind us that the history of Hong Kong cinema dates back to at least 1909. This reminder is important if only to free us from the illusion that the Hong Kong cinema began fully formed with Stanley Kwan, Ann Hui, and Wong Kar-wai. Nevertheless, a critical history would have to address both continuities and breaks. When these filmmakers emerged in the 1980s and 1990s, Hong Kong cinema was in the process of transforming itself from a local cinema with at best a regional distribution, to a transnational cinema viewed and applauded in many other parts of the world. The puzzle that we are still trying to unravel, and that this volume addresses in a variety of ways, is how this transformation came about.

One partial answer is to see the transformation of the Hong Kong cinema as part of a larger spatial transformation, of which the 1997 handover is itself an instance: an important but not determinate instance. Thus it could be argued that the Hong Kong cinema became transnational not by abandoning the space of the local but by *dislocating* it and showing implicitly that the local does not have a local habitation and a name. Dislocation means that we cannot feel home at home; home loses its specificity, but by the same token homelessness loses its pathos. It is Hong Kong cinema's evocation of this sense of dislocation that elicits an immediate intuitive response in New York, Buenos Aires, Johannesburg, or Beirut. The recent trend noted by some contributors towards the co-production of "Hong Kong films" can be regarded, too, as yet another exemplification of spatial dislocation.

(We saw this earlier in mainland cinema when Chen Kaige could no longer rely on state sponsorship after Tian'anmen to make films like *Yellow Earth*, and started making co-produced blockbusters like *Farewell My Concubine*.) Co-production suggests that the identity of Hong Kong or Hong Kong cinema is not some kind of platonic essence, but is made out of changing spatial contradictions and differences.

These spatial changes, unlike a special date, are not immediately visible or intelligible. They are first registered in however inchoate a form on the affective level – provided we understand affect not just as a synonym for emotion, but rather as emotion-without-a-name, or as emotion that we do not yet or no longer understand, and all the more intense for that. Affect is something different from “a structure of feeling” because it is the seemingly arbitrary manifestation of affect that points us towards the perception that the structures themselves are changing. It is not weird psychology but skewed space that produces strange affects, which can take the form of anomalous behavior, or the eruption of the monstrous in the everyday, or the making of dumplings out of human placenta. Affect does not obey the law of genre. We are already seeing in the current Hong Kong cinema a tentative fusion of what is usually regarded as two opposed genres, the documentary and the horror film. Can we expect to see in future the documentary as horror film, the horror film as documentary?

To track the space of Hong Kong cinema particularly after 1997, the Companion enlists the aid of theory, in a spirit not unlike Yeats who wrote that “in dreams begin responsibilities.” Responsible theory is not the same as critical pieties that sound radical and correct. When we denounce “colonialism” in Hong Kong, as we still need to do, we should remember that we are dealing not with the imperialist version but with a mutant form, an “X-Colonialism” that has developed a kind of immunity to the usual remedies and critiques leveled at it. Theory therefore needs new terms and frameworks, but it also needs to be inflected by memory: not memory as perfect recall or as the past caught in a freeze frame, but memory as the relation between fragments of the past, or as something important that we only half remember. As Godard has shown in *Histoire(s) du Cinema*, it is not history that explains cinema, but cinema that makes history legible. This Companion gives us reason to believe that the Hong Kong cinema in the years to come will be equal to the task.

Introduction

Esther M.K. Cheung, Gina Marchetti,
and Esther C.M. Yau

Time haunts Hong Kong cinema in a peculiar way that sets it apart from other film cultures. Critics talk about it in terms of “time pieces” (Stephens 1996), “poets of time” (Rayns 1995), “translating time” (Lim 2001), “violence of time” (Law 2006), and “marking time” (Ma 2010). As Esther M.K. Cheung and Chu Yiu-wai (2004) remind us, Hong Kong film exists at a time of crisis “between home and world.” As a colony on “borrowed time” and as a “Special Administrative Region (SAR),” then and now, Hong Kong marks time in several inevitable shifts in its political identity. Economic booms and busts, imperial twists and turns, postcolonial pains and global migrations give it a timeline unique in world cinema. Hong Kong films narrate our postmodern present and open a window to exilic nostalgia, urban (un) consciousness, everyday imaginations, collective memories, and cultural representations of the past that speak to audiences far beyond the territory’s borders. Filmmakers put “time” on screen as indicated by the titles of films such as *Fulltime Killer* (2003), *Once Upon a Time in China* (1991–97), *Time and Tide* (2000), *Ashes of Time* (1994) and *As Time Goes By* (1997).

However, looking at Hong Kong film in “real” time gives pause. The year 2009 may or may not have been the centenary of Hong Kong cinema.¹ The Benjamin Brodsky-produced comic short, “Stealing a Roast Duck,” no longer exists, but it may, indeed, mark the beginning of Hong Kong’s local film production in 1909. Or, maybe it does not. Evidence of its date of production, plot, and very existence remains sketchy at best. Picking 2009 as the date to celebrate, however, might not have been completely arbitrary. The centenary of Hong Kong cinema seemed to be in very good company. The year 2009 marked the 90th anniversary of China’s May Fourth Movement, the 80th anniversary of the beginning of the Great

Depression, the 70th anniversary of Hitler's invasion of Poland and a banner year for Hollywood film (*Wizard of Oz* [Victor Fleming, 1939], *Stagecoach* [John Ford, 1939], *Gone With the Wind* [Victor Fleming, 1939], *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* [Frank Capra, 1939]). It was also the 60th anniversary of the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC), the 50th anniversary of the Great Leap Forward, the 30th anniversary of the Democracy Wall Movement and the beginning of the Hong Kong New Wave (Ann Hui's *The Secret* [1979], Tsui Hark's *Butterfly Murders* [1979]), the 20th anniversary of the June Fourth Tian'anmen Square crackdown, and the 10th anniversary of the return of Macau to Chinese sovereignty.

Surveying Hong Kong cinema's history from 1909, then, highlights the importance of its geopolitical position – from Hollywood and Europe to its neighbors China and Macau. However, the uncertainty surrounding 1909 also indicates that Hong Kong cinema can never be fully “known” and that its mysteries can make it both a frustrating and rewarding object of study. Perpetually in “crisis,” prey to its commercial position vis-à-vis Shanghai and Hollywood, and subject to the vicissitudes of history from British colonialism to its current status as an SAR of the PRC, Hong Kong cinema tantalizes the scholar with its many enigmas.

Any companion to the tumultuous history and current state of Hong Kong cinema must be willing to engage critically with the known and unknown of the territory's film culture, face the controversies, and move forward in a spirit that accepts contradictions as inevitable. As a companion on the journey to appreciating Hong Kong's place in global film culture, this book collects new research on the cinema. It marks time by providing a framework for understanding Hong Kong cinema through a survey of the extant scholarship as well as providing essays that attempt to break new ground. However, it goes beyond chronicling the history and mapping the territory associated with Hong Kong film studies by matching current critical and theoretical debates in global film studies with cutting-edge research on Hong Kong cinema. It navigates a path between what is known about Hong Kong film (as well as what may likely never be known) and how we can best make sense of what we do know. It also offers tools for the future exploration of Hong Kong film in light of emerging technologies, industrial practices, and economic, social, and political changes.

The primary aim of this book is to situate current scholarship on Hong Kong cinema within the vortex of theoretical debates in contemporary film and cultural studies. For example, instead of providing a linear chronology of Hong Kong cinema, this companion offers a look at how evolving approaches to historiography have shaped the way we understand Hong Kong film history. Rather than look at the history of the depiction of women in Hong Kong film, the chapters collected here explore how changing research on gender, the body, and sexual orientation alter the ways in which we analyze sexual difference in Hong Kong cinema. Developments in theories of (post)colonialism, postmodernism, globalization, neoliberalism, Orientalism, and nationalization transform our understanding of the economics and politics of the Hong Kong's film industry, its relation to global

flows of labor and capital, and its position in relation to the UK and the PRC as well as the local government. Concepts of crisis, diaspora, nostalgia, exile, and trauma offer opportunities to rethink accepted ways of understanding Hong Kong's popular genres and stars. Approaches to deciphering the everyday urban space provide insights on the aesthetics and politics of Hong Kong as a locality within global-national-local transformations. The book also poses philosophical questions concerning how we understand what we see on screen in Hong Kong cinema and how we make sense of this knowledge. Building on this theoretical framework, the volume explores various aspects of Hong Kong film culture within geographic, aesthetic, institutional, cultural, and scholarly contexts. Hong Kong cinema provides a very rich site to generate theoretical discourse in dialogue with film and cultural studies.

Taking a theoretical approach to Hong Kong cinema is not unprecedented. Paul Bowman's *Theorizing Bruce Lee* (2010) immediately comes to mind, and many scholars have engaged Hong Kong cinema with an eye to contemporary debates in cultural theory (e.g., Ackbar Abbas and the "déjà disparu," Esther Cheung on Benjamin's "moment of danger," Evans Chan, Stephen Teo, and Tony Williams on postmodernism, Meaghan Morris on Bruce Lee's pedagogical practices, David Martin-Jones on Deleuze and Jackie Chan, Rey Chow and sentiment). However, this theoretical turn is rather recent and coincides with the spotlight turned on Hong Kong film in the years leading up to the 1997 Handover. There is a need to look back as well as forward to clear a path for new research.

Two phases of scholarly interest in Hong Kong cinema in English shape the field historically. The first coincides with the phenomenal commercial advance of Hong Kong martial arts films outside of the Asian market in the early 1970s. Beginning with the breakout success of *Five Fingers of Death / King Boxer* (1972), it soon reached its peak around the time of Bruce Lee's death in 1973. Although not directly related to this phenomenon, Jay Leyda's history of Chinese cinema *Dianying: Electric Shadows – An Account of Films and the Film Audience in China* appeared in 1972. Even though the book devotes only a single chapter to Hong Kong cinema and draws heavily on Cheng Jihua's Chinese-language book *The History of the Development of Chinese Cinema* (1963), Leyda does set the stage for many of the historical works to follow that place Hong Kong film within the broader context of Chinese cinema. Verina Glaessner's *Kungfu: Cinema of Vengeance*, written for a popular audience in 1974, takes a sobering look at exploitation within Hong Kong cinema, the structure of the industry, the representation of gender in the martial arts genre, the nature of the film audience, and the struggles faced by filmmakers and performances at all levels. Ian Jarvie's 1977 *Window on Hong Kong: A Sociological Study of the Hong Kong Film Industry and Its Audience* offers a more comprehensive overview that goes beyond Leyda's need to link Hong Kong to developments in the People's Republic and Glaessner's exclusive focus on *kung fu*. He takes a more systematic approach to Cantonese- and Mandarin-language production, the rise of popular genres, and the importance of female stars within the

studio system. However, Jarvie's focus on the postwar colonial environment and films made primarily in the 1960s and early 1970s only gestures toward the phenomenal changes that would occur with the worldwide embrace of Bruce Lee, Jackie Chan, and Hong Kong's action cinema.

The regular publication of bilingual catalogues by the Hong Kong International Film Festival, which began in 1978, contributed to the understanding of Hong Kong film culture in a more sustained way. However, aside from some scattered essays primarily on martial arts cinema, serious attention from international film scholars only began to pick up again and produce monographs on Hong Kong film around the time of the Handover in 1997. The 1990s saw the rise of the second phase of Hong Kong New Wave cinema with filmmakers such as Wong Kar-wai, Stanley Kwan, and Clara Law, the belated embrace of Jackie Chan outside the Asian region, where he had been a major star for decades, and the growth in international popularity of Hong Kong cult cinema featuring "heroic bloodshed," Category III excess, and Oriental exoticism. However, scholars took some time to catch up with these developments. It seems remarkable, for instance, to realize that twenty years separates Jarvie's book from Stephen Teo's *Hong Kong Cinema: The Extra Dimensions* (1997). However, given that 1997 marked the end of British colonial rule, it comes as no surprise this date would provide the apposite moment to consider the history, contributions, current state and likely future of one of the world's most productive and varied motion picture industries.

As the combined titles of David Bordwell's *Planet Hong Kong: Popular Cinema and the Art of Entertainment* (2000) and Lisa Odham Stokes and Michael Hoover's *City on Fire: Hong Kong Cinema* (1999) indicate, Hong Kong film became a hot property globally in the years leading up to the end of the millennium. Many other fine books dealing with Hong Kong cinema have appeared since 1997 as well. However, most focus on specific filmmakers (Johnnie To, John Woo, Tsui Hark, Wong Kar-wai), genres (horror, martial arts films), studios (Shaw Brothers), periods (pre- and post-1997 cinema), or single films (the New Hong Kong Cinema series from Hong Kong University Press). This volume moves in another direction by taking up the major theoretical debates that define film and cultural studies today in order to chart a new course for future research on Hong Kong cinema.

Previously published collections on Hong Kong film have gestured in this direction. Poshek Fu and David Desser's *The Cinema of Hong Kong: History, Arts, Identity* (2000) enlarges the field by juxtaposing historical and auteur studies with consideration of Hong Kong film as urban cinema inflected by transnational flows, diasporic formations, postmodern aesthetics, and nostalgic reflections on the colonial past. Esther C.M. Yau's introduction to her anthology, *At Full Speed: Hong Kong Cinema in a Borderless World* (2001), highlights cultural globalization, translocal as well as regional connections, and puts forth the world city notion to conceptualize Hong Kong cinema in a more sophisticated way. Esther M.K. Cheung and Chu

Yiu-wai's *Between Home and World: A Reader in Hong Kong Cinema* (2004) examines how the notion of the "crisis cinema" provides a critical paradigm for investigating Hong Kong cinema through a combined lens of the global, national, and the local. Gina Marchetti and Tan See Kam, editors, also explore the global reach of Hong Kong film using Hollywood as a compass in their volume, *Hong Kong Film, Hollywood and the New Global Cinema: No Film is an Island* (2007). *Chinese Connections: Critical Perspectives on Film, Identity and Diaspora* (2009), edited by Tan See Kam, Peter X. Feng and Gina Marchetti, place Hong Kong cinema in regional and trans-local networks as well as within Chinese diasporas. Meaghan Morris, Li Siu-leung, and Stephen Ching-kiu Chan's edited volume, *Hong Kong Connections: Transnational Imagination in Action Cinema* (2005), places Hong Kong action film genre in trans-local, global reception, and cultural discourses. Lo Kwai-cheung's *Chinese Face/Off: The Transnational Popular Culture of Hong Kong* (2005) explores the ethnic borderlands of Hong Kong's popular discourse. Edited by Esther Cheung, Gina Marchetti, and Tan See Kam, *Hong Kong Screenscapes: From the New Wave to the Digital Frontier* (2011) is the first of its kind to offer alternative paths and theoretical perspectives for the study of Hong Kong's commercial, art-house, and independent screen productions.

Some studies of local cinema and individual films also put forward theoretical premises that pertain to locality and transcultural implications, including work by Steve Fore, Pang Laikwan, Michael Curtin, Julian Stringer, Leon Hunt, Christina Klein, Kin-Yan Szeto, Kenneth Chan, Martha Nochimson, Jenny Lau, Sheldon Lu, and Zhang Yingjin, among others. Other have stretched the theoretical boundaries of Hong Kong cinema with studies involving gender and sexuality, including the work of Yau Ching, Helen Hok-sze Leung, Audrey Yue, Olivia Khoo, Yvonne Tasker, Li Siu-leung, David Eng, Song Hwee Lim, Tan See Kam, and Chris Berry, among others. Looking at independent filmmaking and the urbane, Esther M.K. Cheung's *Fruit Chan's Made in Hong Kong* (2009) provides theoretical views on memory and identity; many of the other volumes in the Hong Kong cinema series also take the theoretical foundations of inquiry into this area very seriously. The scholarship suggests a vibrant field of study. This volume's unique contributions are built on this exciting conceptual work and they make advances on what has been established. By highlighting the often contentious debates that shape current thinking about film as a medium and its possible future(s), this companion provides a theoretical platform and critical blueprint for the ongoing study of Hong Kong film.

Hong Kong cinema poses some particularly thorny questions for a field dominated by studies of Hollywood and European cinema. Given the prominence of "national" cinema research in which language, ethnicity, geographic borders, and cultural identity become paramount in understanding specific films, identifying Hong Kong cinema in relation to a specific "nation" poses some serious problems. Moreover, Hong Kong boasts a global standing and transnational production and distribution network that places it in competition with Hollywood

in some regional markets. Hong Kong, like Hollywood, is a cinema that has been shaped by exiles, immigrants, and diasporic migrants throughout its history, and the continuing exchange of technology and talent within Asia as well as with the West needs to be understood theoretically in relation to postcolonial flows, hybrid cultures as well as global capitalism. Kwai-cheung Lo, for example, calls Hong Kong an “ethnic borderland,” and this position on the edges of Chinese identity must be taken into account. Stars, such as Bruce Lee, Michelle Yeoh, and Jackie Chan, attain global celebrity while others outperform Hollywood personalities regionally.

Hong Kong, as Asia’s so-called “world city,” itself is a cosmopolitan icon and a major “star” of the territory’s cinema. Within Hong Kong as well as Hollywood film, the city’s skyline serves as shorthand for non-Western urbanity, locality, modernity, and occasionally dystopian imaginations of the future in films such as the Japanese anime *Ghost in the Shell* (1995) and the Hollywood blockbuster *The Dark Knight* (2008). Its space borders China but extends into the world beyond in a way that other Asian cities do not, while simultaneously Hong Kong hosts very local popular expressions of humor, as seen in films by Stephen Chow and the animated series *McDull*, Canto-pop music and dance films, and the ritualized annual viewing of the Lunar New Year comedies. It has a local stake in political issues that have a global reach, including questions of the “rule of law,” representative democracy, neoliberal economics, the global penetration of consumer capitalism, and the continuing importance of feminism, LGBTQ and anti-imperial agitation.

Hong Kong’s commercial industry may be perpetually in “crisis,” but out of that has come a lively, varied, and mature film culture. This book attempts to take the full spectrum of Hong Kong cinema into account as it juxtaposes commercial features with experimental video, cartoon animation with CGI-simulated live action, documentary production with spectacular star vehicles, local comedies with transnational star-studded blockbusters, and mainland co-productions with activist agit-prop interventions. In the process, it pushes current film theory to reconsider definitions of “global,” “transnational,” “diasporic,” and “accented” cinema and expand considerations of urban, feminist, queer cinema in light of Hong Kong’s contribution to the international New Wave, independent, festival, and art film as well as the new documentary and micro-cinema movements. Hong Kong intervenes in global film aesthetics on multiple fronts, and this book spotlights highly visible genres, stars, and auteurs as well as occult gems and more modest cinematic endeavors. From the darlings of Cannes to the vulgar trash on the back shelf of the soon-to-be-defunct video store, Hong Kong pushes the parameters of scholarly understanding of film form as well as camp culture.

This book features innovative, previously unpublished essays written by scholars up to the challenge of theorizing Hong Kong cinema for the future. These contributors have demonstrated expertise in the field, and they offer their perspectives

on the key debates in Hong Kong film studies. Many of the chapters feature a polemical incursion into ongoing controversies in the field, while others outline the broader parameters of these debates. The book is divided into six parts, each featuring a short commentary that highlights major issues and emerging trends linking the chapters to larger conversations in the field. More interventions than summaries, these provocative short postscripts take readers beyond the parameters of the individual chapters and point them to topics requiring further discussion, analysis, and debate.

Part I: Critical Paradigms: Defining Hong Kong Cinema Studies

Part I includes essays which explore Hong Kong cinema from both historical and theoretical perspectives. It establishes four critical paradigms – the national, the global, the urban, and the ethnic – as focal points for analyzing Hong Kong cinema. With both a historical survey of the critical literature and an original angle of articulating that field of study, the essays map out a terrain for a film and cultural studies approach, and provide an overall framework for readers to explore crucial cultural issues in the subsequent sections of this companion.

In the light of Hong Kong–PRC co-productions in the new millennium, the section begins and ends with the chapters that deal with new shifts in Hong Kong cinema. Esther Yau writes about the attraction and appropriations of Hong Kong movies amongst viewers of the mainland to consider a complex connectivity in the cinemas of Hong Kong and China as one phenomenon of cultural globalization. With the notions of managed globalization and transregional flexibility, her chapter examines “cultural renationalization” and “reinvention” in co-production as a practice with imbrications of state, industry, and identity that are manifested in the tensions of partnership, assimilation, and difference. Dealing with the urban topography in the new millennial films, Esther Cheung offers “crisis cinema” as a critical paradigm to examine the intricate relationship between urbanity, globality, and postcoloniality. The study of “topophilia” as a new structure of feeling and locality as threatened and crisis-ridden sheds new light on the dynamics of the post-handover cultural milieu and its everyday space. This spotlight on quotidian culture, everydayness, and locality find its resonance in other chapters in the section on narratives and aesthetics. Kwai-cheung Lo investigates the topic of ethnic borderland in which multiple meanings of ethnicity and their representations chart the process of territorialization and reterritorialization. With this critical paradigm, he proposes to view the cultural politics played out in ethnic bodies as what illuminate otherness and exoticism that are relevant to discussions of gender and sexuality as well as critical geographies in the subsequent sections of this companion. Mirana Szeto and Yun-chung Chen take a critical view of the ways neoliberal ideology and “mainlandization” have restructured the industry, practices, and co-produced films of Hong Kong. Their chapter investigates the cultural politics in

a post-1997 “cinema of anxiety.” Sheldon Lu’s commentary on the critical paradigms in this section proposes to include new terms within the transnational frame to encompass the modes of existence in contemporary Hong Kong cinema on national, local, regional, and global levels.

Part II: Critical Geographies

In this part, the critical and creative geographies of Hong Kong cinema are mapped beyond the confines of the city, its identity, and its well-discussed relationship with Hollywood. The essays re-historicize and theorize transnational Hong Kong cinema through examining its connections with Japan since the 1960s, incorporation of new regionalism of Asia through exotic Asian bodies, and its translocal co-production in the Chinese mainland. The essays challenge the cultural nationalist characterization of Hong Kong cinema by attending to the new economic and power structures, or geopolitics, of the region, and examine the agendas and practices of expanded creative geographies in films and in programming of the Hong Kong International Film Festival.

Olivia Khoo investigates the regional imaginary of Hong Kong cinema that defines itself vis-à-vis exotic Asian bodies, the latter as figures of a Hong Kong identity that incorporates Asian visibility, accented dialects, culture, economic, and political imperatives. Kimberley Wing-yee Choi and Steve Fore examine complications in local consciousness and map translocal geographies through the inventive McDull feature-length animation series produced by a small Hong Kong based franchise between 2001 and 2012. The stories and creatively fanciful animation topography illuminate the shifts in boundaries and identities following co-production practices with mainland partners. In response to a rigid state ideology, the films’ counter-strategies ascertain the importance of place-making along with translocal geographies opening themselves to multiple horizons. David Desser examines Hong Kong–Japanese connections in terms of the local cinema’s historical strategies of transforming its films and styles into a cosmopolitan and global entity and re-historicizes Hong Kong cinema’s transnational achievement beyond its well known borrowings and surpassing of Hollywood’s pictures. The essay’s rich references and examples characterize Japan as a modernizing and regenerating source for Hong Kong martial arts films with the stories, specialized locations, and a model in producing films for a regional audience and festival audience. Cindy Hing-yuk Wong discusses creative and critical geographies through programming in the Hong Kong International Film Festival as a laboratory of globalization and a unique node of the local and the global that are heavily entangled with the economics, networks, and personal connections in the world of film festivals. Evans Chan details the emergence of Hong Kong cinema as a geo-cinema which has been nourished by cultural forms rejected by the modernist, legislative, state-building center of the post-1911 Chinese nation-state. Stephen Yiu-wai Chu

elucidates the concepts and method of critical geographies, and he highlights the salient contribution of each essay in this section to understanding the shape and future of Hong Kong cinema.

Part III: The Gendered Body and Queer Configurations

The analysis of gender and sexualities has taken a distinctively global turn in recent years focusing on transnational sexualities beyond borders, redefinitions of gender made flexible by global migration, and intimacy straining the boundaries of the nation, the family, and the couple. This section reflects and re-historicizes studies of gender and sexualities (straight, queer, metrosexual, and amorphous) through taking up questions of local cultural politics as well as that of Western and Chinese sexual norms. The chapters also bring existing critical discourse on gender and sexuality in Hong Kong films into conversation with critical elaborations of corporeality, performance, memory, and intimacy.

Gina Marchetti begins the section by considering some of the ways in which Hong Kong women filmmakers have taken up feminist themes and gender politics in the decade since the establishment of the HKSAR in 1997. Using three films by Ann Hui, she sets the stage for the chapters that follow by looking at the way in which Hong Kong's particular blend of cosmopolitanism and feminism has been translated on screen by the territory's most celebrated woman filmmaker. Focusing on a younger generation of filmmakers, Helen Leung employs queer critical studies to interrogate the way intimacy and space find visual expression the HKSAR. Audrey Yue moves the consideration of queer issues into the Chinese diaspora by looking at Hong Kong filmmakers' treatment of the domestic sphere. Shu-Mei Shih responds to the way in which the border between Hong Kong and the Chinese mainland figures in all three chapters as gender and sexuality take on new meanings in a postcolonial setting.

Part IV: Hong Kong Stars

In this part, a selection of Hong Kong stars and star texts are in conversation with recent scholarship on ethnonationalism, regional imagination, cultural politics, geopolitical locality, and post-DVD textuality. The essays rehistoricize and resituate star studies of Hong Kong cinema in the intertextual materials and intersecting discourses in local, global, and national frames.

Paul Bowman theorizes the resurgence of Bruce Lee in recent Hong Kong martial arts films as an ethnonationalist specter in the reworking of China as a filmic construction. The essay examines previous scholarship on the influence of Bruce Lee's fight choreography in world cinema and analyzes the recent and successful

Ip Man films among others to illustrate the structuring of visual, cinematic, and dramatic quotations of Bruce Lee in films that make a metonym of Hong Kong as an economically successful conduit of East and West. Tony Williams examines the stardom of actor and director Wang Yu as a transitional martial arts star representing regional imagination. The first detailed study of martial arts masochism and obsession vis-à-vis Wang Yu's trajectory in notable Shaw Brothers productions, the essay combines film genre and historical scholarship with star studies to re-evaluate the scope of Hong Kong martial arts cinema studies. Natalia Siu-hung Chan makes a close analysis of the cross-dressing performances of Leslie Cheung and Anita Mui. Using theories of flexible dualities and performance, the essay establishes the stars' charisma in two groundbreaking paradigms in Hong Kong's screen and stage performance history. Kin-Yan Szeto makes a provocative examination of Faye Wong's multiple, contradictory cinematic personae on screen in the films of Wong Kar-wai. Faye Wong's image of coolness does more than leverage a paternalistic economy but amounts to disrupting dichotomies of tradition and modernity, local and global, as well as the dominant narratives of nationalism and neocolonialism. Gary Bettinson reviews existing scholarship on Hong Kong stardom and advocates "a poetics of performance" as a critical paradigm for Chinese star studies of film with the focus on acting and star performance.

Part V: Narratives and Aesthetics

This part contains a range of essays from the general exploration of the stylistic and aesthetic characteristics of Hong Kong films to analyses of specific moments of innovation and experimentations in Hong Kong film history. With a mixture of popular films and avant-garde video productions, it explores the connection of narrative time and space in relation to locality, translocality, and polylocality. It probes the difficulty of generic classification for Hong Kong films, redefines the relationship between the local and the global, as well as examines the way in which the aesthetic – nostalgia, documented sentiments, and the musical soundtrack – provides productive ways of analyzing Hong Kong cinema.

Fiona Law opens this section with her study on Chinese New Year (CNY) films. By working on a corpus of films which shed light on the relationship between locality and the ritual of movie-going during festive times, she examines CNY films as both artifacts of popular consumption and everyday practices. Bliss Lim's essay on ghost films expands the scope of translocality by analyzing films produced in a pan-Asian context. Her analysis of the two layers of allusionism in the chosen films brings to bear the contradictions inherent in this transnational mode of production. With a focused study on Wong Kar-wai's *Chungking Express*, Giorgio Biancorosso analyzes how the sound of music is an embodiment of a global–regional–local nexus. He argues that, together with the film's narrative and *mise-en-scène*, the soundtrack helps to shape our understanding of a city / place in

mutation. Focusing on a selection of video productions which she calls “diary films,” Linda Lai explores the way in which sentiments in screen texts can be deciphered as narrative forms and historiographical accounts. With these so-called independent productions, she examines how 1997 can be thought of as a sustained historical moment where a subdued form of activism in a locality can be observed. Yingjin Zhang responds by proposing “space-time, nostalgia, reception, and performance” as four additional sets of issue for ascertaining the relationship between narratives and aesthetics in Hong Kong cinema.

Part VI: Screen Histories and Documentary Practices

As questions of collective memory, cultural heritage, and nostalgia rub up against the process of decolonization, demands for democratic participation, visibility in the public sphere, and the rule of law in the HKSAR, filmmakers face challenges that link Hong Kong’s colonial past to its current political landscape. This section highlights issues involving contested histories, cross-border cinematic imaginations, documentary interventions, activist aesthetics, human rights, and the rule of law.

Vivian Lee begins this section with a critical look at the treatment of Hong Kong history on screen. Ain-ling Wong looks at the importance of the archive to an understanding of Hong Kong film history’s place within the wider sphere of Chinese-language cinema. Ian Aitken and Michael Ingham highlight current developments in Hong Kong documentaries against the backdrop of the history of non-fiction filmmaking in the territory. Marco Wan concludes the section by examining the way in which human rights, justice, and the law appear on Hong Kong screens. Stephen Ching-kiu Chan wraps up not only this section, but the entire volume with his thoughtful commentary on the political implications of the current state of Hong Kong cinema.

This volume provides not only a companion on the path to understanding Hong Kong cinema’s past contributions, but offers a roadmap for plotting future scholarship and navigating the heated debates that continue to make it such a dynamic field within film, media, and cultural studies.

Notes

- 1 See the recent debate in Lai, Shek 黎錫 (2014), “105 Nian qian de yiduan xianggang dianyingshi gongan: Li Minwei yu Zhuangzi shi qi” 105年前的一段香港電影史公案: 黎民偉與《莊子試妻》 (“An unsettled issue of Hong Kong film history 105 years ago: Lai Man-wai and *Chuang Tzu Tests His Wife*”), *Ming Pao* 明報 (May), <http://premium.mingpao.com/pda/ppc/colDocDetail.cfm?PublishDate=20140517&File=vx001a.txt&token=b218bc260b89c0>. Accessed September 3, 2014.

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Part I

Critical Paradigms

Defining Hong Kong Cinema Studies

Watchful Partners, Hidden Currents

Hong Kong Cinema Moving into the Mainland of China

Esther C.M. Yau

The naming of Hong Kong cinema became detached from the city of Hong Kong in the mid-2000s when its major local film companies, producers, and directors relocated their offices and personnel to the Chinese mainland to redirect their energies into co-producing films. The Cantonese film legacies and local Hong Kong stories that gave this cinema its reputation remained largely absent from the “co-production films” (*he pai pian*) made under partnership terms in the mainland of the People’s Republic of China (hereafter the PRC or China).¹ In growing quantity and budget, co-produced films capitalized on distribution privileges, massive numbers of moviegoers, and government endorsement to become the highest-grossing pictures in the annual output of the PRC.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s co-produced films were occasional, low-budget, “cross-border” ventures involving China’s state film studios. By the early 1990s there were award-winning features coming out of this practice to expand the screenscape of Hong Kong cinema. Redefined by partnership arrangements, co-production after the mid-2000s became the very medium that drove the unprecedented transregional move of the Hong Kong film industry. Relocating creative talents and genre filmmaking experience into China played a substantial part in China’s state-managed cultural globalization through a rapid expansion of China’s commercial cinema; a form of soft power for the early twenty-first century.

Moving Hong Kong’s film industry operations inevitably brought change to the ideoscapes and mediascapes of the mainland. From the perspective of film history, this is a key instance of the “return” of capitalist cinema to the Chinese mainland, since the culture industry of Shanghai was nationalized after the Communist takeover in 1950. This is also an instance of Chinese capitalism

playing a prominent role in the historical performance of Hong Kong's transregional accumulation and imagination.

The Close Economic Partnership Arrangement (CEPA, 2003) and its supplementary clauses provide strong economic incentives for many Hong Kong service sectors and producers to place themselves under a different business culture in the Chinese mainland market. Operating as one of the free trade agreements that China adopted as a World Trade Organization member, CEPA established an accessible means for Hong Kong-based companies to share expertise, investments, cultural resource, talents, facilities, and profit with mainland partners by setting up offices and operations in mainland cities. Under CEPA's terms of bilateral trade and industry partnerships, the Hong Kong–China co-production movies have the same status as PRC films; in particular, they retain a higher percentage of box-office receipts compared to imported films, which are additionally restricted by annual quota limits. To salvage what they could from a prolonged state of declining returns, all of Hong Kong's established film companies set up offices in Beijing or Shanghai to relearn the rules of the game in China. Their experiences echo those of many service sector companies that adapted themselves by building mainland business networks in advertising, banking, cultural entertainment, education services, finance, insurance, law, photographic and printing services, telecommunications, and the like.² CEPA and its supplements thus amount to providing the legal grounds for the integration or assimilation of every vital business sector of Hong Kong with the China market, bringing about significant reorientation and new hegemonies.

Obvious ideological differences between the place-based cinema of Hong Kong and the state-sponsored films of the PRC continue to exist, as they have since the early 1950s. Besides the more hardcore aspects regarding the government's image and the Party's authority, the State Administration of Press, Publication, Film, Radio and Television (SAPPRFT) runs a stringent censorship regime covering the treatment of politics, contemporary history, the image of China, crime, and sex among other areas. Reorientation means that co-investments will aim at apolitical entertainment to establish a commercial cinema for China. Not unexpectedly, the Hong Kong industry that over-produced genre films in the 1990s also recycled old formulas, neglecting local culture or politics, in its mainland operations. Self-domestication began to take place in shaping the scripts and final films when twenty-first century mainland investment took the place of pre-sales in Southeast Asia and Japan that characterized the 1960s and the 1970s (Law 2000; McDonogh and Wong 2005). Leaving local sensibility behind, according to Bono Lee, means that the time of a "post-Hong Kong cinema" has come, and all that is left is to seek out the "hidden currents" or traces of the preceding (read, more vibrant) Hong Kong cinema in the co-produced films (Lee 2012). The idea that there are resilient styles, sensibilities, and legacies in Hong Kong cinema that have persisted against all odds sounds comforting, even though this gives no small hint of nostalgia and assumes a prospect of success in the absence of any guarantee that one may find imaginative and impressive currents in a vast ocean of bland entertainment.

More than two decades of cross-border flow of Hong Kong movies and popular music to the mainland encouraged and supported a new and unexpected community of viewers and critics. When Hong Kong movies were still illegitimate goods prohibited from circulation by the Chinese government, many were able to access them through the technologies of videocassette disc (VCD) and digital videodisc (DVD). This exposure turned some viewers into cinephiles familiar with world cinema's classics and auteur films. Their favored choices of Hong Kong comedies, crime thrillers, and classic Shaw Brothers' movies of the past gives them cause to cast a critical eye on co-produced films (Shen 2012). As will be shown later, selective appropriations of Hong Kong film classics in China's independent films have come via this undocumented, illicit exposure. One outcome of this once-underground flow is that mainland critics and cinephiles are as capable as their Hong Kong counterparts in identifying any worthy "hidden currents" in films, and many have learned to become equally watchful over the comparative achievements of other cinemas.

Within reviews of co-produced films in journals, newspapers, and published monographs, there is often evidence of film studies education taking effect among educated viewers. An often used citation from the translated study of *Planet Hong Kong* (David Bordwell 2000) to describe the appeal of Hong Kong films as "all too extravagant, too gratuitously wild" (*jin shi guo huo, jin shi dian kuang*), for example, indicates that in China Hong Kong films continue to be subject to transnational appraisal via cyberspace in which Chinese critics participate. On the other hand, a Sinocentric disavowal of Hong Kong as a relevant cinematic entity in co-production films has emerged, to fuel a debate over vanished identity versus remnant but vital currents.

Just as transnational flows are a phenomenon of cultural globalization, concepts related to the latter can be adopted to examine co-produced films. That is, co-produced films are not just about China and Chineseness on the one side, and Hong Kong or Hongkongness on the other. One such concept is "managed globalization," a reference to China's state initiation of bilateral trade agreements to manage the process of cultural globalization following the country's membership of the World Trade Organization (WTO). The term "managed globalization" refers to the PRC government's top-down policy-making and intervention in managing growth of the country's economy within a world market economy. Various management strategies help to expand the circulation of Chinese cultural products by permitting increased private ownership to loosen the grip of state monopoly, allowing imported entertainment to indulge the audience's fantasies, and making reforms in management and business practices (Yan 2002). Thus, "managing" refers not only to the state's strategies to "maximize benefits and minimize vulnerabilities" (Saunders 2000); these strategies are aligned with Chinese capitalism flourishing without forgoing the engineering of Chinese nationalism and content control. The Chinese state recognizes and allows open criticism of capitalist globalization with US domination, but nationalism with internal hegemony and

colonization remains a blind spot to many. Instead, the dominant market occupation model becomes one that drives management reform and restructuring of many sectors, which in the film industry means a private sector of companies in film production, and a select few getting into the business of film distribution and exhibition. Managed globalization thus mirrors capitalist globalization in creating opportunities of immense profit for a small number of operations, and hence the development of sharp inequalities. From this top-down perspective, film co-production with Hong Kong and other places through bilateral trade agreements amounts to reorienting China's film sector to an industry mode with the commercial and export capacity as measure of its success.

Taking note of the ways managed globalization translates global forces into the state's legitimacy and authority through managing economic growth does not mean that state intervention and CEPA are the sole determining force in shaping the life of cultural productions. By taking note of the undocumented flows of movies and movie-exhibition technologies into the mainland, I raise the previously remarked tendency to seek out unofficial cultures and the uncommon illuminations of (popular) cultural productions on the part of viewers. In this discussion this may be taken as another substantial force in the long-term reception and recognition of a cinema's strengths and merits that outlasts the relatively fast cycles of economic boom and bust. Besides, just as audiences of the late 1990s voted against bland Hong Kong productions by closing their wallets, the same has happened to Hong Kong audiences' response to many bland co-produced films. Alertness to the quality issue revealing the downside of state-granted protection and privilege as twin problems of managed globalization is essential, especially if cultural productions in their local or co-produced forms are to affect impressionable, transnational imaginations through various auditory-visual "currents."

In the business culture of Hong Kong filmmaking, survival is both a strength and a problem. Since the 1950s, commercial filmmaking in Hong Kong has been financed by transregional capital, with Asian investors, relocated entrepreneurs and artists (writers, directors, photographers and so on), and regional and overseas audiences. Transregional resources and cross-border ventures were key to accumulation (Fu 2007). They reflect cultural globalization through flexible accumulation of capital and resources (Ong 1997), not to mention assimilation and synthesis of various regional cultures and global genre idioms (Yau 2001). Flexibility as a *modus operandi* implies being open to co-investment, co-production, dialogue dubbing, outsourcing, and modifying of content and scenes in order to enhance mobility of production as well as access to different regional and overseas markets (Chan 2011). Strategies to seek multiple sources of funding including pre-sales and a regular export trade of low- to medium-budget martial arts, crime thriller, and romantic comedy movies have sustained a small industry's intermittent growth (Stokes and Hoover 1999). The successes have put this cinema on the map of cross-cultural consumption, along with popular reception of Hong Kong movie stars overseas (Farquhar and Zhang 2010). Working through

the postwar years of industry building and Mandarin / Cantonese filmmaking separate from its Shanghai antecedents, the experiences of export-oriented production and genre filmmaking have built legacies that make Hong Kong film culture a vital part of postwar popular culture in East Asia (Fu 2003). Adoption of a modern identity and translation of idioms from capitalist cinemas, including those of noir, musical, and urban romance have also taken place since the 1960s. The stories of absent fathers, police / gangster entanglements, returning ghosts, romanticized criminals, and lonely rebels share an anti-authority outlook, including disrespect towards official history. These films of the 1980s and the 1990s incorporated and reinvented idioms of Hollywood, European, Japanese, and early Cantonese cinema to make icons that circulated to global screens and were transnational. Despite their popularity, these films are regarded as carrying the stigma of “spiritual pollution” in the eyes of PRC film officials. This is a clear indication that the anti-authority outlook of Hong Kong films of the 1980s and 1990s does not fit with China’s political idioms and monitored sensibility, meaning that attempting to adopt idioms and sensibilities from either side would lead to contradictory ideologies and inconsistent outlooks. Following official permission, the problem of ready compliance as the downside of adaptability shows up in early co-produced films made with a “mercenary approach,” a ready “(self-) mainlandization” and a “utilitarian nationalism” (Szeto and Chen 2012; Chu 2013). These prominent characteristics of compliance, though obvious since the mid-2000s, have their local precedents in the guise of cheap imitations of successful genre films and mercenary filmmaking. Among other reasons, one must acknowledge the lack of government and social resources applied to the cultivation of literary talents and creative filmmaking practices during most of the colonial era during which time commercial culture was always given heavy emphasis in the city. The outcome of the neglect, and transregional survival tactics, has been the evolution of a general mediocrity in industry practice as well as in the Hong Kong movies. Hence, a time of ample funding of mainland operations with new restrictions immediately prompts manifestation of a utilitarian ethos that reveals a lack of the resources of imagination needed to fuel and sustain reflections and alternative possibilities.

The co-produced films of Hong Kong and China destabilize the singular identity of Hong Kong cinema of the 1990s along with the bounded notion of a PRC cinema of the mainland. In most studies completed during that era, despite mentions of a “China–Hong Kong” identity question, and analysis of representations illustrating a “China syndrome” in the local Hong Kong features, there has been little discussion of co-production, including cross-border productions on the mainland. One obvious reason has been an intense interest on local culture before the 1997 takeover. A good example is in a seminal discussion of Hong Kong films of the 1990s as the products of a cultural space of disappearance in which the films *Once Upon a Time in China* (Tsui Hark, 1991–93), *Center Stage* (Stanley Kwan, 1992), and *Ashes of Time* (Wong Kar-wai, 1994) are taken to illuminate their directors’

response to this space (Abbas 1997: 24). The fact that all three films have undertaken a cross-border mode of co-production in the mainland is rarely, or never, mentioned; the films' material and symbolic relations to these conditions as well as their transregional imagination are left out of the discussion, thus turning the cross-border phenomenon into one of disappearance. To insist on appearance and visibility can be a problem itself. The naming of co-produced films as "China-Hong Kong co-production films" (*zhong gang he pai pian*) for certain critics already carries with it a hierarchical order, with the dominance of the nation-state, or just the state, taken for granted by many. Critics who are convinced of the disappearance of Hong Kong into China have used such words as "melt" (*rong*, taken to mean total assimilation), "encompass" (or "include") (*rong*), and "getting grounded" (*jie di qi*) to name China's encompassing of Hong Kong cinema on the basis of production site, finance, and market, so that it is an abstract "China," rather than the PRC film industry (which is another subject beyond the scope of this discussion), that acts as the grand center of assimilation. This simplified notion has excluded the actual film business operations that are always network-based, lack transparency, are prone to reversals – boom and bust – and characterized by splitting as much as by temporary partnerships (Zhang 2008; Zhan 2013).³ When a nationalist perspective of co-production has already gone so far as to disavow the role of Hong Kong in the process, Hong Kong cinema is taken as no more, and the relocated directors are no longer Hong Kong directors, even if mainland critics may bemoan the existence in recent co-production films of recycled generic formulas and hackneyed plot twists from earlier Hong Kong films.⁴ The fact that those formulas are so well known to the mainland audiences, while the reverse has not been the case with the Hong Kong audience, can serve as an argument that a cinema and its transnational reach do not vanish altogether but remain a debated issue. To many Hong Kong-based critics, mainland relocation means a kind of sell-out, abandonment, and explicit subjection to the powerful tactics of control (Choy 2010), thus a disappointment when it comes to any self-expression of Hong Kong in the co-produced films. Hope is also invested in the young and recent entrants to local independent filmmaking (Shum 2014), along with awareness of the incorporation of explicit Hong Kong-style narrative strategies in co-production films so they can better compete with "indigenous" commercial films directed by young mainland directors.

The debates on the identity and future of Hong Kong cinema manifest existing divergences anticipated in the "One Country, Two Systems" setup adopted by the PRC ruling regime under its leader Deng Xiaoping. Since China's takeover of Hong Kong in 1997, "one country, two cinemas" has become more than a mere fact. So far, putting Hong Kong filmmakers in co-produced films has been a part of managed globalization (as a gainful outcome of bilateral trade agreement) and an instrument of state assimilation (through cultural renationalization of film content). In what respect should co-production be taken as a distinct yet continuous entity from the cinemas of the PRC and Hong Kong? Clearly, the practice

operates under a separate set of regulations. There are procedural, technical, and stylistic relations of continuity and discontinuity between these two cinemas, such that as an entity it includes the limitations and dreams of more than one cinema. It is certainly possible for a Sinocentric view to encompass the cinematic entities with terms like a “Greater Chinese cinema” and a “Greater China filmmaker.” For this discussion, I retain the connecting dash in “Hong Kong-in-mainland operations” and “China–Hong Kong co-production film” to take note of the spatial dynamics, cultural politics, and reinventions that put certain putative characteristics of Hong Kong films and Hong Kong culture in suspense. The dash acknowledges the flows of images, ideas, narratives, and styles across various terrains, provoking localization tendencies along with competitive forms of mimicry and cinema-building. There are other possible descriptions of the relocations and dislocations in “China–Hong Kong co-production films” in general, and the phenomenon of “mainland-in-Hong Kong” suggests discussions that will not be pursued here. Taking insight from Arjun Appadurai, connectivity through translocal and transregional flows is also understood as incapable of stopping disjunctures, resistances, and differentiations from occurring (Appadurai 1996). Hence, instead of adopting the “death of Hong Kong cinema” as a notion to characterize co-production as discussed above, the emphasis is on the performances and mutations of Hong Kong cinema in the making of China’s commercial cinema that continue to generate responses to cultural globalization, mainland resources, and mainland audiences. For the same reason, China’s cinema does not remain the same when the mediascapes, ideoscapes, and business practices of filmmaking in China have incorporated mixed legacies and ideas from elsewhere. Thus, the “China–Hong Kong” co-production cannot be considered under the national paradigm alone.

The context and related issues of Hong Kong-in-mainland operations and the co-production films of Hong Kong and China discussed above are further elaborated in the following related aspects: 1) the salient business moves of Hong Kong industry, involving producing, filmmaking, and multiplex business as a transregional force of global culture; 2) an alternative potentiality of Hong Kong films, with examples of critical appropriations that identify alienation as a shared condition of modernity; and 3) an example of partnership and a discussion of a partnership imaginary of two co-produced films.⁵

Hong Kong Films and Business in the Chinese Mainland

The movement of Hong Kong film industry to the Chinese mainland has well-known causes linked to economic decline since the mid-1990s (Teo 2008: 342). Many directors sought opportunities but found reduced transregional funds, and experienced technicians moved to work in mainland television stations. In China, many state film studios also struggled financially with insufficient box-office

receipts to cover production costs, low productivity, and low morale (Zhu 2003). Membership of the World Trade Organization (WTO) was seen as an inevitable step, and with bilateral trade agreements increasing the number of imported films from ten titles per year at the outset to 34 titles in 2012, there was a rise in film distribution and exhibition.⁶ Hollywood and Hong Kong imports accounted for more than two-thirds of the market share. This meant “fierce debate[s] and sharp division” regarding cultural imperialism and how China’s filmmaking might survive its encounter with an aggressive and experienced Hollywood (Su 2011).⁷ Hong Kong movies quickly reaped rewards from being counted among China’s annual film imports, with quite a few run-of-the-mill features taking in ten to 40 times more than could have been earned from the Hong Kong box-office alone. China Film Corporation, the state film distributor, also gained from the import-distribution boom, while China’s state film studios got the least direct benefit. The state’s liberal economic policy created other new inequalities with the granting of a film distribution permit to one private company and allowing certain private investors to get into movie multiplex building in metropolitan Beijing and Shanghai, followed by the well-populated second- and third-tier cities. Imported films appealed massively to young viewers seeking weekend and holiday entertainment, and an expanding market sped up the cycles of production, distribution and exhibition.

Permission for private enterprises in an emerging commercial cinema in China changed the outlook of many cultural brokers. To them, the China that had been a place of forbidding politics, material scarcity, and state propaganda for decades turned into a vast marketplace of young consumers with spending power that meant an industry boom in the early twenty-first century. Four Hong Kong companies (Edko Films, Media Asia, Emperor, and Mandarin) were among the ones that immediately took advantage of opportunities for expansion under CEPA. Edko Films, a longstanding Hong Kong distribution company specializing in art-house films since 1950, set up a Beijing office and invested in blockbusters as well as medium-budget co-produced films including *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (Ang Lee, 2000), *House of Flying Daggers* (Zhang Yimou, 2004), *American Dreams in China* (Peter Chan, 2013), and *Finding Mr. Right* (Xue Xiaolu, 2013). By investing in the features directed by Ang Lee and Zhang Yimou, Edko (Beijing) Films gained blockbuster producing experience and global reach. Media Asia Entertainment Group, a Hong Kong-based production / distribution company since 1994, signed regional and China-based contracts for telecasted movies, and established Shanghai Media Asia Limited to consolidate regular business with the Shanghai Film Group to produce and distribute co-produced films. Media Asia also invested in China’s Huayi Brothers’ productions that banked on the reputation and popularity of director Feng Xiaogang that includes *A World without Thieves* (2004), *The Banquet* (2006), and *If You are the One* (2008), and also in the Poly-Bona financed and distributed features that were shot in mainland (such as *The Warlords*, directed by Peter Chan, 2007 and *A Beautiful Life*, directed by Andrew Lau, 2011) and in Hong Kong (*Triangle*, co-directed by Tsui Hark, Ringo Lam, and Johnnie To, 2007).

The boom times that have seen Media Asia grow into an entertainment conglomerate is an example of the tendency to integrate movie-making with television drama production and the music business.⁸ Emperor Entertainment Group is a subsidiary film company of Hong Kong's Emperor Group, with business in financial services, real estate, film production, star management, concerts, television, publication, jewelry, and restaurants.⁹ Emperor CEO Albert Yeung has invested in co-production films such as *CZ12* (2012) and in Hong Kong-made features (such as *Blind Detective*, Johnnie To, 2013) targeted towards the China market.¹⁰ Mandarin Film Distribution (1991) has produced films and run multiplexes in Hong Kong and it owns subsidiary companies Mandarin Film Production (Singapore), the Mandarin Laboratory International (in Hong Kong), and a sound recording studio. Besides investing in profitable co-production films including *Ip Man I* and *II* (Wilson Yip, 2008 and 2010), it runs a profitable Mandarin (post-production) Laboratory (in Hedian in Zhejiang Province), and a Mandarin publicity company (in Beijing).¹¹

Hong Kong investments also moved into the multiplex chains in the mainland. Ng See-yuen, a local director turned film exhibition entrepreneur, founded the UME (Ultimate Movie Experience) Cineplex with ownership of new movie multiplexes in the cities of Guangzhou, Shanghai, Chongqing, and Hangzhou.¹² Action star Jackie Chan acquired co-ownership of thirteen "Jackie Chan-Yaolai International cinema" multiplexes in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Xian, Tianjin, Zhengzhou, Chengdu, Kunming, and four other cities.¹³ In the US, going to movie multiplexes has diminished significance as the result of choices afforded by DVD rentals, personal collections, cable selections, and internet sites (Acland 2003; Klinger 2006), whereas in China in 2014 about 1,609 screens were added in the first three months, making a total of 20,007 screens. Film entertainment in shopping mall multiplexes provides a stable locus of visual consumption especially during the holidays and the New Year (Coonan 2014).

In the years 2012 and 2013, reported annual box-office returns in the PRC went up to RMB 17 billion (approximately US\$2.8 billion) and RMB 21.8 billion (US\$3.6 billion) respectively, from RMB 810 million (US\$97.8 million) in 2000.¹⁴ The new commercial Chinese films (of which co-produced features have the most prominent box-office presence) took nearly 58 percent of the annual market share in these years alongside the imported "mega features" (*da pian*) from Hollywood (Qing 2007; Frater 2013). The China market now accounts for about 40 percent of the annual growth in Hollywood movies' box-office returns from the Asia-Pacific region. This is prompting studio executives and independent producers to line up features targeted to this market and to initiate co-production deals (Frater 2013).¹⁵

The better-known co-produced films depend on the recycling, reuse, and reinvention of various established Hong Kong genre idioms to a mainland-based story. Collaboration in producing, a Hong Kong director at the helm, and employment of proportionate numbers of creative artists (according to the quota set by CEPA)

constitute the norm. Genre variations include crime thrillers (*Drug War*, Johnnie To, 2012), comedies (*CJ7*, Stephen Chow, 2008), martial arts dramas (*Ip Man I and II*, Wilson Yip, 2008 and 2010; *The Grandmaster*, Wong Kar-wai, 2013), martial arts action in 3-D technology (*Flying Swords of Dragon Gate*, Tsui Hark, 2011), rags-to-riches fantasy (*American Dreams in China*, Peter Chan, 2013), romance (*Love in the Buff*, Edmond Pang, 2012), and remakes of Mao era classics (*The Silent War*, Alan Mak and Felix Chong, 2012). The mainland-based locations, acting talents, cultural sensibilities, history, and nationalist sentiments infuse what one may call the films' cultural renationalization, while there remains a range of styles, narrative strategies, and craftsmanship that make the obvious legacies and currents of Hong Kong cinema and popular culture.

Stringent censorship tampers with certain content but cannot homogenize the selective adoption of global and local idioms. The auteur director Wong Kar-wai, for example, undertook a thorough study of the existing traditional schools of martial arts in the mainland in preparation for his reflective, melancholic, and diaspora-infused martial arts drama *The Grandmaster* (2013). Its story of affective disappointment is what has characterized the films *Chungking Express* (1994) and *In the Mood for Love* (2000), now translated into the missed appointment of two martial arts masters, Ip Man (Tony Leung) and Gong Er (Zhang Ziyi), whose affection for each other begins with their spectacular match / fight in a gilded pleasure house in Foshan where Northern and Southern masters meet in southern China, then ends years later in the diaspora setting of Hong Kong. The cosmopolitan outlook and restraint that Ip Man displays as the Wing Chun master is put to the test not merely by the challenging of other masters, but by grandness itself being put to test through temptations to arrogance, compliance for survival, a vengeful guarding of family honor, and lowly living with painful memories of loss. The film draws from the fame of Bruce Lee as the best-known disciple of Ip Man, without investing in a ready-made nationalism that the film *Ip Man I* has.

In a first full-scale co-production film, Johnnie To relocates the genre convention of police procedural to an old city section of Tianjin, and the film adopts the well-honed narrative strategies of doubling and mirroring, entangled destinies, and suspense based on mistrust that have characterized Milkyway productions. The usual cast that appears in many Johnnie To films becomes an ensemble that is pursued by relentless mainland cops.¹⁶ Alan Mak and Felix Chong co-directed a feature that has precedents in China's "anti-espionage films" by having Tony Leung playing a mute piano-tuning worker with superior auditory capacities and who is taken captive by the Communist to detect hard-to-catch enemy Morse codes, thus adapting what they did with code-sending in *Infernal Affairs* to a civil war setting. Even though film crafting continues, the popularity of the transferring and adapting process has put many film directors into a low-creativity mode of repackaging.

It is no surprise that genre filmmaking expertise was a welcomed presence in the commercial turn of China's cinema. From *Crazy Stone* (Ning Hao, 2006) to

Table 1.1 Hong Kong Directors' Co-production Films in China (2003–2013)

Director	Films shown in China	Box Office in Yuan
Johnnie To	<i>Don't Go Breaking My Heart</i> (單身男女, 2011)	95.5 million
	<i>Life without Principle</i> (奪命金, 2011)	24.8 million
	<i>Drug War</i> (毒戰, 2012)	147.54 million
	<i>Blind Detective</i> (盲探, 2013)	209.13 million
Wong Kar-wai	<i>2046</i> (2004)	30 million
	<i>The Grandmaster</i> (一代宗師, 2013)	288.28 million
Tsui Hark	<i>Seven Swords</i> (七劍, 2005)	83.45 million
	<i>All About Women</i> (女人不壞, 2008)	22.8 million
	<i>Detective Dee and the Mystery of the Phantom Flame</i> (通天神探狄仁傑, 2010)	295.5 million
	<i>The Flying Swords of Dragon Gate</i> (龍門飛甲, 2011)	540.55 million
Ann Hui	<i>Detective Dee: Rise of the Sea Dragon</i> (狄仁傑之神都龍王, 2013)	601.72 million
	<i>Jade Goddess of Mercy</i> (玉觀音, 2003)	5 million
	<i>The Postmodern Life of My Aunt</i> (姨媽的後現代生活, 2006)	6.64 million
	<i>A Simple Life</i> (桃姐, 2012)	68.19 million
Peter Chan	<i>Perhaps Love</i> (如果愛, 2005)	29.8 million
	<i>The Warlords</i> (投名狀, 2007)	201.1 million
	<i>Wu Xia</i> (武俠, 2011)	173.3 million
	<i>American Dreams in China</i> (中國合夥人, 2013)	539.28 million
Benny Chan Muk-sing	<i>Rob-B-Hood</i> (寶貝計劃, 2006)	92 million
	<i>Connected</i> (保持通話, 2008)	44 million
	<i>City Under Siege</i> (全城戒備, 2010)	88 million
	<i>Shaolin</i> (新少林寺, 2011)	210.3 million
Jacob	<i>The White Storm</i> (掃毒, 2013)	236.59 million
	<i>A Battle of Wits</i> (墨攻, 2006)	61.5 million
	<i>Rest on Your Shoulder</i> (肩上蝶, 2011)	6.8 million
	<i>The Storm Warriors</i> (風雲II, 2009)	59.53 million
The Pang Brothers (Danny Pang Phat & Oxide Pang Chun)	<i>Out of Inferno</i> (逃出生天, 2013)	132.71 million
Wong Ching-po	<i>Mob Sister</i> (阿嫂, 2005) (not shown nationwide)	5 million

Sources: CEPA 港片導演這10年: 別再叫我們港片導演, 我們已經找到大陸的感覺 <http://news.mtime.com/2013/12/02/1521253.html>; 太平洋電影網 <http://www.cinema.com.cn>; 藝恩娛樂諮詢 <http://www.entgroup.cn>; 中國電影報 <http://weibo.com/u/2304129841>. All accessed May 22, 2014. The ordering of the directors follows that of the sources.

Finding Mr. Right, the former a comedy with investment from megastar Andy Lau and the latter a romantic comedy with investment from Edko Films (Hong Kong and Beijing), China's young directors have been making their first commercial features. The change in their box-office records within six years is telling: the former made around RMB 23 million and the later RMB 85 million in the China market. Commercial ventures with low investment came into the scene quickly as well: *Lost in Thailand* (Xu Zheng, 2012), a low-budget slapstick comedy with a traveling story (thus a road movie setup) features a country bumpkin with good moral values. It cost RMB 30 million and it made RMB 1 billion in box-office returns.¹⁷ A cycle of medium- and low-budget features, mostly romances and comedies, reliably draw teenage audiences into the multiplexes (Zhang 2010). Not unexpectedly, urban dramas, comedies, and teen pics with vernacular expressions offer strong competition to China–Hong Kong co-production films and Hollywood imports. Their intimate stories, indigenous sensibility, evocations of collective memory, and local expressions, including hard-to-translate jokes, place emphasis on place-based specificities and have many cinema precedents that compete well against Hollywood imports. Seen this way, young Chinese directors finding ways to compete with high-budget imports and co-production films are not unlike the young Hong Kong directors responding to Cantonese films in the early 1980s. What they make for China's commercial cinema tends to promote global escapist entertainment.

The Hong Kong-in-mainland operations and the Hong Kong co-production films in China (or China–Hong Kong co-production films) have features that are similar to co-productions in international film history; they are distinct from China's occasional co-productions with Europe and Hollywood.¹⁸ From the perspective of past and existing articulations, the features can be summarized in seven points:

- 1 Hong Kong action cinema has moved on from its historical connection with Shanghai to running its own course, with well-crafted, emotion-loaded films of the martial arts and crime thriller variety; flexible accumulation through overseas markets and co-production help in handling a declining audience and in seeking out new markets.
- 2 The issues of preserving national film production, protective regulations, state intervention (including sponsorship), profit share, proportionate numbers of cast and crew from the co-producing sides, the approval process, mobility of labor, reservations and complaints are simultaneously common to co-production settings and specific to the changing mainland and Hong Kong contexts.
- 3 Reinventions of global genre idioms in Hong Kong's cosmopolitan urban setting have shaped the incorporation of selective Chinese cultural resources for several decades, whereas co-produced films in China require new de-selection and re-selection of idioms.

- 4 A rapid expansion in movie screens and distribution business has given a boost to production, with relatively short cycles of return and re-production as an indication of China's existing market potential.
- 5 Disparities in film production culture and business culture between the mainland and Hong Kong have set the relocated producers and directors on the watch for financial risks and partnership with China's state film corporations and successful (semi-)private entities.
- 6 A lack of transparency in China's network- and relation-based film industry is compounded by increasing vertical integration of production and distribution.
- 7 Competition from young Chinese directors and from China's co-production projects with other countries can mean short-term stability for the relocated Hong Kong directors. Should more co-productions with Hollywood materialize, the competition could put the relocated Hong Kong directors in the same insecure position as the state film studio directors have experienced (Yu 2009).

Appropriation and Reinvention in China

In 1986, John Woo's *A Better Tomorrow* featured a professional gunman who took down a horde of rival gangsters in smooth, near-dancing, movements but was wounded and became a crippled guard of a parking lot. The film was released when local protests against the building of a nuclear power plant in southern China (Guangdong Province) got no response from the PRC authorities. The besieged hero, played by Chow Yun-fat, is an underdog with the capacity to take control of things in the right direction but suffers betrayal and the kind of slight that resonates with a collective sense of helplessness at the time. Li Cheuk-to, commenting on the coincidence of the film's pessimistic melancholy and the social activism's failed result, noted that the film (along with *City Kids* [Poon Man-kit, 1989]) exemplifies a paradigm shift from that of waning of tradition and family ethics to the idea of fraternal honor in an uncertain future, which the present generation must confront without assurance (Li 1994). What later became known as classic "heroic bloodshed" movies, featuring men with aspirations, skills, and a sense of honor who try but fail to overcome powerful forces of evil, have cross-border resonance with certain experiences, including those during the Cultural Revolution and other hard times. Their social imaginary of alienation, distrust, injustice, and inadequacy, in which the individual is forced to pay a high cost to survive, bespeaks of a different perspective on the promised progress of Chinese modernity. With an anti-authority outlook and devoid of didacticism, the films also provided escapist entertainment for the young. Evidence of their popularity can be seen in the large numbers of itinerant peddlers and tiny neighborhood stores selling pirated Hong Kong movies on VCD in the mainland rather than any public sales records (Wang 2003). These were also early encounters with capitalism

and many young viewers only belatedly intimated their familiarity with this cinema by way of cyberspace and written comments on their stars and other memorable sights and sounds.¹⁹

A belated, open homage to John Woo's *A Better Tomorrow* appeared two decades later in the movie *Still Life* (Jia Zhangke, 2006). Known to critics as an auteur of China's cinema for his innovations in holding together both fiction and documentary modes in the narrative space, Jia Zhangke is acquainted with Hong Kong movies of the 1980s. *Still Life* is an intricate sonic and visual articulation of cinema that takes a view of modernization from the ground up. A migrant worker looking for his departed wife and daughter meets a young man in a small town that is about to be submerged under massive flooding as the result of the construction of the Three Gorges Dam. The man, who tells others to call him "little Ma," performs like Chow Yun-fat: he lights a cigarette with a money bill, mimics a show of brotherhood, but admits his helplessness by taking a line from the John Woo classic: "We are no longer suitable for the times, because we are too nostalgic." His dead body is later covered by a heap of debris, then given a river burial that mirrors the submerging of living habitations under a monumental project of state modernization in the Upper Yangtze River.

A critical view from the grassroots also features in a portmanteau feature, *A Touch of Sin* (Jia Zhangke, 2013). The film's name is a homage to King Hu's Taiwan *wuxia* classic *A Touch of Zen* (1971), and two of the four episodes depict a humiliated man and a humiliated woman turning to violence to enact their own justice where no other persons or means exist between each alienated individual and the evils of rampant corruption, underclass oppression, and misogynist attitudes towards a female as sex service provider. He puts a gun to use and she does the same with a blade. There is no hint of redemptive honor or Brother Fat-type friendship; instead, there are violent, lonesome assertions battling the high and low forces of abjection.

In view of the provocative use of genre idioms, it is not an exaggeration to note that Sinophone martial arts and crime films orient their viewers to the alienating forces of capital. Alienation was not an unfamiliar experience with nation-building years under the Mao regime, and, as shown in a Fifth Generation film *Peacock* (Gu Changwei, 2005), the state workers are cogs in the industrialization machine who monitor each other under strict prohibitions against self-expressions and individualism. Even as a source of "spiritual pollution" in the mainland, Hong Kong movies went into city neighborhoods and towns through the unplanned economy of smuggling. Not only action cinema but also comedies and Shaw Brothers productions drew attention to the material cultures of fashion, interior design, and privately owned automobiles along with various styles of individualist behaviors, bold language, and sentimentality to impart the lures and warnings of colonial capitalism. They contain paradoxical rewards and warnings of being urban, modern, individual, and cosmopolitan in the midst of ample instances of disappointment, betrayals, pathologies, and perversions. Put



Figure 1.1 Citation of Hong Kong film in *Still Life* (Jia Zhangke, 2006), an independent production.

differently, the alienating material, psychological, and symbolic dimensions of capitalist modernity address themselves through entertainment across social separation and ideological difference to appeal to an already alienated population under a different system that is drawn to that of another.²⁰

One subject of alienation is the border-crossing migrant who withstands setbacks and takes hold of new opportunities in big cities. Aside from the said appropriations of *Still Life* and *A Touch of Sin*, there are films before and after co-production that speak to the attractions of Hong Kong culture and their incorporation in Chinese capitalism. *Comrades*, *Almost a Love Story* (Peter Chan, 1996) and *Lost in Beijing* (Li Yu, 2007) completed before and after CEPA and on different sides of the Hong Kong–mainland border are illustrative instances. *Comrades* exemplifies migrant sensibilities through the popular songs of Deng Lijun (Teresa Tang), location scenes in Hong Kong and the US, and references to transnational imagination through stars and consumption. Its story of a young man and a young woman climbing the social ladder after they arrive at Hong Kong separately though on the same train from the northern and the southern mainland provinces illustrates the self-conscious adoption of migrant narratives. The female protagonist Li Qiao (played by Maggie Cheung) turns to working as a masseuse and cohabits with a gangster (played by Eric Tsang) before following him in his transPacific escape that land the undocumented couple in New York City. *Lost in Beijing* depicts sexual relations embroiled in monetary exchange and emotional revenge. Its story of a rural migrant couple working in lowly jobs in

Beijing has an oppressive setting. The married woman Pingguo (played by Fan Bingbing) was raped by a client (played by Leung Kar-fai) from southern Guangdong Province while serving him as a masseuse, and her husband Ah Kun (played by Tong Dawei), a window cleaning worker, arranges to sell her anticipated baby to the boss for a compensatory sum of money.²¹ Commenting on *Comrades*, Rey Chow notes that the character Li Qiao does not seek to return to old Communist values when interruptions to her pursuits appear; instead, she forges a substitute path that is enforced by the film's reified commodities including sweet music, thus making possible a "perverse process of subjectivization" (Chow 2007: 119). Similar perversions can be said of the decision made by Pingguo in *Lost* as well: she neither gives up wealth for the sake of her baby nor hangs onto her rich boss, but exits quietly with her baby and her boss's money without letting the men know of her whereabouts. This "perverse subjectivization" is reinforced by the films' attentiveness to material possessions and desire for youthful bodies. Not coincidentally, two migrant females in *Comrades* and *Lost* take on the part of female masseuse, withstand economic and sexual exploitation, and refuse to return to utopian collectivity. A departure from *Comrades'* nostalgic inflections, *Lost* goes for a dehumanizing setting of rape, womb appropriation, and wife-for-sale. Without enjoying the same reputation, the mainland production has made a bleak reinvention of the romantic migrant narrative.

The screen performances of well-established actors in co-production films serve as a measure of the mainstreaming of reinvention, counter to the instances discussed above. Changes in the screen roles of the native-turned-transnational actor Chow Yun-fat are telling: his performances in John Woo's "heroic bloodshed" films have inspired a critical appropriation noted above, but his roles have become more respectable: from playing a professional killer, wounded gunman, police mole, and prisoner in the 1980s, Chow becomes a screen emperor (*Curse of the Golden Flower*, Zhang Yimou, 2006), a scholar-philosopher (*Confucius*, Hu Mei, 2010), and General Yuan Shikai (*The Founding of a Party*, 2011). There have been occasional roles when Chow plays a business tycoon and veteran gambler when director Wong Jing got into co-produced features for release during the Chinese New Year. In less conventional narratives, Chow plays a warlord and his impersonator (*Let the Bullets Fly*, Jiang Wen, 2010) and a cheat (*The Postmodern Life of My Aunt*, Ann Hui, 2006). The latter is a feature set in contemporary, metropolitan Shanghai with a scene re-enacting an iconic image of Chow in raincoat walking away from the camera, but the tall man is no swinging gunman – he is a mere small-time operator who scams on a lonesome, middle-aged language teacher. The film's intersecting stories of abandonment and deception refuse to corroborate any prosperity narrative and instead, point to a broken state of familial and social bonds that have young and middle-aged females and males resorting to scant resources and perverse survival schemes.

Appropriation and reinvention involve the work of artists and cultural brokers that crosses the boundaries of national and local cinemas. In lieu of a comprehensive

study, it is important to note this form of “horizontal” connectivity that shapes the looks, styles, genre idioms, and sensibility of the films. There are several implications to consider: the space for evocative appropriations remains possible with narratives and genre idioms convening alienation, though there are only a few precedents of such while critical perspectives are largely missing in the co-produced films; the reinventions and references complicate the symbolic aspects of films such that the cross-border work that shape them is not reducible to economics alone, nor is state censorship the only reason to blame for films’ reticent cultural politics; the assimilation of Hong Kong cinema into that of the mainland is a complicated matter when set within a frame of cultural globalization that considers “horizontal” cross-cinema work with appropriation and reinvention open to various possibilities; and big business by way of partnership-based co-production and blockbuster filmmaking has the tendency to merge escapist entertainment with the acceptance of the subjectivization of capitalism.

Borrowing, mimicry, citation, and reinvention that are said to have marked Hong Kong cinema and its relationship to American, European, and Japanese films in the context of cultural globalization are relevant in examining co-productions. This is not to overstate replications of mimicry as a continuation of derivative filmmaking extending from commercial filmmaking in Hong Kong to China. To note a certain leveling capacity of genre conventions does not amount to saying that the films undergo an auto-Westernization, or that the differences in the two cinemas would be erased as the result of homogenization. Rather, the appropriation and reinvention complicates the territorial bounded concept of national cinema. With the film market in China open to Hollywood’s global reach, and China’s directors working in parallel with Hong Kong commercial genre filmmaking, the cultural renationalization of Hong Kong cinema entails intersections with global culture that cannot be reduced to economic or business assimilation. Scholars have noted that CEPA as a free-trade agreement is not a mere economic instrument; rather, its impact on Hong Kong film industry’s major economic restructuring has ramifications for film content, labor, and identity (Chu 2013; Szeto and Chen 2013). Whereas the notion of “renationalization” usually refers to the process by which private ownership is converted to state or public ownership, CEPA has included clauses stating the profit percentage that Hong Kong businesses in mainland can keep in private hands, thus only performing partial “nationalization” of profit while allowing the means of production to remain privately owned. Renationalization occurred with Shanghai cinema after the Communist takeover of private resources and merged all private companies into the state-run Shanghai Film Studio. The film directors, actors, writers, and artists became state employees and were subjected to campaigns of political criticism and ideological re-education that forbade them to connect with Western ideas and bourgeois cultures. By comparison, the takeover of Hong Kong in the year 1997 operated by way of the official “One Country, Two Systems” arrangement, with the mainland system remaining separate from that of HKSAR until the year 2046, at least theoretically so.

Rather than nationalization, there is cultural renationalization through the making of co-produced films whereby the mainland's setting, cultural sensibilities, historical events, spoken language, literary resources, and talents have prominent presence. Cultural engineering within the national territory is not the same as nationalization of private resources, as it does not rely on any prohibition against Hong Kong companies producing films to show outside China. Circulation of cultural renationalized films can easily make business a witting or unwitting partner of transnational projections of soft power.

Partnership

From the very start, distribution and release dates remain most important for co-produced films to do well. China Film Corporation has decision-making power over these aspects. In 2001, SAPPRT granted a film distribution license (*dian ying fa xing xu ke zheng*) to Bona Film Group, making it the first private company to get into the film distribution business. Yu Dong, founder and owner of Bona Film Group, is a 1994 Beijing Film Academy Management Department graduate. He gained domestic distribution experience with Beijing Film Studio and China Film Group from 1994 to 2000. Leaving state employment to start a small Beijing Bona Culture Communication Company that year, he first represented film studios and then started distributing China–Hong Kong co-production films by using a prepay method. With initial success, he first merged with a state-owned company to form PolyBona Film Distribution, and in 2006 bought back the shares then obtained private equity from Sequoia Capital to found Bona Film Group (Chu 2010). Within these six years, PolyBona and Bona distributed several co-production films with profitable returns: *The Touch* (Peter Pau, 2002), *Cat and Mouse* (Gordon Chan Ka-sheung, 2003), *Dragon Tiger Date* (Wilson Yip Wai-shun, 2006), *After This Our Exile* (Patrick Tam, 2006), and *Confession of Pain* (Andrew Lau and Alan Mak, 2006). It went on to distribute *The Postmodern Life of My Aunt* (Ann Hui, 2006), *Connected* (Benny Chan Muk-sing, 2008), and *Overheard* (Alan Mak and Felix Chong, 2009). Bona also joined with multiple investors in several co-produced films, including *Protégé* (Derek Yee Tung-sing, 2007), *Flash Point* (Wilson Yip Wai-shun, 2007), *The Warlords* (Peter Chan, 2007), *An Empress and the Warriors* (Ching Siu-tung, 2008), *Three Kingdoms: The Resurrection of the Dragon* (Daniel Lee Yan-gong, 2008), *Red Cliff* (John Woo, 2008), *CJ7* (Stephen Chow, 2008). With *Overheard* (2009), Bona Film Group began distributing co-production films back to the Hong Kong market. In December of 2010, Bona Film Group went public on NASDAQ by obtaining an Initial Public Offering (IPO). Bona achieved full vertical integration in the same year by acquiring multiplexes through Bona International Cineplex Investment & Management Company Limited. No antitrust lawsuits or decrees yet exist to prohibit vertical integration from happening quickly. Producing and

distributing 14 additional co-produced films took place in the following four years. The focused strategy has also ended in artistic recognition, with six of the Bona-invested features winning Best Film award at the annual Hong Kong Film Awards: *After This Our Exile*, *The Warlords*, *Bodyguards and Assassins* (2009), *Gallants* (2010), *A Simple Life* (2011), and *The Grandmaster* (2013).

There is a race for companies to get a substantial share in a booming yet unpredictable China film industry. As mentioned earlier, diversifying services and forming a small conglomerate make an obvious business strategy in the China operations of Media Asia, Emperor Entertainment, Edko Films, and Mandarin Films. Producing films has become the best way to guarantee a hand in their distribution. Bona Film Group, after building a record of success in distributing China-Hong Kong co-production films, went into producing. Yu Dong, its CEO, has extensive knowledge of domestic distribution; he also adopted star-studded celebration events common in the mega-festival of Cannes to attract media attention. With Polybona and Bona, Yu Dong has invested in several key Hong Kong directors. Ann Hui as one of the latter makes just such a reference in *A Simple Life*, in which Yu Dong makes a cameo appearance as a mainland producer to whom Hong Kong directors Tsui Hark and Sammo Hung pitch their film ideas as gainful ventures. Though brief, and set within a story of a mutually caring relationship between a Hong Kong film producer and his aging domestic helper, the scene contains a vignette of the budget-and-profit centered conversations and a mercenary approach as the centerpiece of mainland-centered partnerships after CEPA came into effect.²²

A well-publicized yet short-lived partnership involving Yu Dong, Peter Chan, and Huang Jianxin is a case of de-/selection in the process of vertical integration and flexible accumulation. Peter Chan has been a member of four film companies either as partner or founder / owner, a path closely linked to his own trans-regional trajectory. Having grown up in Thailand and studied for some years in the United States before landing in his film career in Hong Kong, Peter Chan is best known for his directorial success with *Comrades*, *Almost a Love Story* (1996). In 1991, he formed a partnership with Eric Tsang, Claudia Chung, and Lee Chi-ngai. Their company, UFO (United Filmmakers Organization Limited), made a few popular urban dramas with investment through presales with regional distributors. The best-known UFO films are: *Tom, Dick & Harry* (Peter Chan & Lee Chi-ngai, 1993), *He Ain't Heavy, He's My Father* (Peter Chan and Lee Chi-ngai, 1993), and *He's a Woman, She's a Man* (Peter Chan, 1994), and there were also a few flops (Chung 2011). UFO remained while Peter Chan went to Hollywood and directed *The Love Letter* (1999) for DreamWorks but did not find the corporate culture suitable for his career. As Hong Kong movies lost appeal for overseas investors and regional audiences in the late 1990s, Chan founded his company Applause Pictures to produce movies for the young in Asia's regional market, with some success in Thailand and Korea. Following the enactment of CEPA, Chan moved his office to Beijing, formed We Pictures with mainland director Huang Jianxin and focused

on making co-produced films. The co-produced genre films under his direction include a musical (*Perhaps Love*, 2005), an imperial intrigue (*The Warlords*, 2007), a mixed detective–martial arts film (*Wu Xia*, 2011), *Bodyguards and Assassins* (as producer), and a fantasy success story (*American Dreams in China*, 2013).

A member of China's Fifth Generation directors, best known for his cinema of the absurd, Huang Jianxin became a partner of Cinema Popular with Yu Dong and Peter Chan. Huang's early films won critical acclaim and were well recognized by scholars of post-socialist films (Pickowicz 1994). Counter to the Fifth Generation's festival films set in exotic and vague historical settings, Huang Jianxin took a challenging path, with social satirical films to illuminate life in contemporary urban China. His "post-socialist" films exhibit a range of salient absurdities in urban China of the post-Mao era linked to political paranoia, alienation, surveillance, and pathologies in everyday interactions. These include: *Black Cannon Incident* (1986), *Dislocation* (a.k.a. *The Stand-in*, 1987), *Samsara* (a.k.a. *Transmigration*, 1988), *Stand Up, Don't Bend Over* (1992), *Wooden Men's Bride* (1993), *Back to Back, Face to Face* (1994), *Signal Left, Turn Right* (co-directed with Yang Yazhou, 1996) *Surveillance* (co-directed with Yang Yazhou, 1997), and *Gimme Kudos* (2004) among others. Besides being invited to overseas film festivals, Huang Jianxin has lived in Australia and Hong Kong. Along with partnering with Peter Chan in We Pictures, Huang Jianxin became co-producer and co-director of China's government-sponsored major motif films *The Founding of a Republic* (2009) and *The Founding of a Party* (2011) with celebrity actors and directors from the mainland and Hong Kong. This change of direction is in keeping with China's Fifth Generation directors aligning their career with Chinese state capitalism, about two decades after most of the Hong Kong New Wave directors turned towards commercial genre films.

Cinema Popular announced its film production plans of 15 co-produced features within three years in February of 2009. *Bodyguards and Assassins* is the first feature of the group. Produced by Peter Chan and directed by Teddy Chan with help from Andrew Lau, *Bodyguards* brought profit to the company. Before the second production began, however, Yu Dong terminated the business relationship. The first production had a large daily cash outlay to pay for the completion of a nineteenth-century Hong Kong street movie set, and schedule delays due to the stars' over-scheduling with other productions. According to Peter Chan, the duration of a one-year production is the main concern for Yu Dong. Possibly, the usual problems that many directors have tolerated in Hong Kong-style productions became too risky for a cautious investor who has many options. Taking note of personality difference as an explanation for the end of the partnership, Peter Chan mentioned boundaries and his dominating work style (Sun 2013). Since Bona has already achieved vertical integration of distribution and exhibition, it simply deselected a partnership to reduce potential loss. Such is not the case for individual directors whose prospects are subject to existing and future systems of distribution and exhibition, be they in physical locales or digital platforms.²³

Partnership Imaginary and Cultural Memory

Deliberate and unexpected alliances have a longstanding presence in Hong Kong cinema, with the latter receiving elaboration through unlikely friendships between figures of the law and the outlaw, starting with the films of John Woo and Ringo Lam. Allies and companions have vernacular Cantonese expression “*say dong*” (buddy) invoking trouble-sharing. Written vernacular terms for “partner” include “*he zuo zhe*” (the people in cooperation with each other) and “*he huo ren*” or “*huo ban*” (the ones who cook together). Their written Chinese characters point to primitive aspects of the relation: “*he*” (unite) is made up of the “human” and “mouth”; “*huo*” (cooking, making meals) made up of “human” and “fire,” and “*ban*” (companionship) of “human” and “half.” They embed the reference to primary survival, companionship, and (co)existence. One may take liberties to extend the idea of “fire” to the “aspirations” or “passion” in partner relations. In a different context, a companion, partner, or a joint-owner appears in the classical Greek word *Koinonos*. The notion of *koinonia* has a rich first-century New Testament reference to the fellowship of a persecuted minority with a shared conviction. Partnership involves subjects sharing passion, conviction, and suffering aside from mere companionship or co-existence. By comparison, modern capitalist partnerships of the twentieth century, including state–corporate alliances, rely rather heavily on legal instruments, management technologies, and business options. Finessing of apparatuses and instruments for border-crossing capital and ventures clearly apply to CEPA and its supplementary clauses that brought about partnership and the completion of co-production films.

The co-produced film *Bodyguards and Assassins* carries an implicit partnership imaginary that puts a local tycoon and a teacher in the center of action. The fantasy action movie is set in the Victoria City of Hong Kong at the turn of the nineteenth century, when a few courageous workers defend their benefactor and master and end up fighting against the Qing imperial soldiers coming to the city to assassinate Dr. Sun Yat-sen and curb the sparks of the 1911 Revolution. This re-nationalizing packaging does not obscure the central maneuvers in the first half of the film whereby the tycoon’s established benevolence and influence are what brings together a team of bodyguards, thus making an uninspiring borrowing of the recruitment of bandit-fighting samurais *Seven Samurai* (Akira Kurosawa, 1954). Tycoon Li Yutang is played by China’s veteran actor Wang Xueqi (who has appeared in the Fifth Generation films as well as major motif films), a choice that echoes the rising prominence of mainland entrepreneurs as well as mainland corporations in Hong Kong, with possible allusion to the colonial legacies of integrating local tycoons and elites into its economic governance that supports neo-liberalism in HKSAR in the post-1997 years.²⁴ Li’s investment in his son’s education in the film finds ample reference in the Chinese parents who, though wary of Western ways of life, have put their children in famous overseas universities overseas to enhance the family’s

symbolic capital. The casting of roles and character details thus enact transregional imagination, with a story of ordinary workers and a theater troupe in Hong Kong who have birthplaces in China being an obvious reference to a long history of the city as a Chinese diaspora. A period drama set in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and a modern Revolution that generates no significant opposition among Chinese communities provide the grounds for the cooperation that is necessary for the co-production process.

There is a narrative of expected alliance between Li Yutang who supports the teacher Chen Xiaobai (Tony Leung Ka-fai) and his protection operation. Tycoon Li's reasons to risk his personal networks are not fully evident, though the businessmen intend to keep the status quo of a relatively open environment for business under colonial rule. His friendship with a Chinese superintendent in the colonial police force is an indication that there is common interest between them. Unexpected alliance has a role in the characterization of the operation's fighters or the bodyguards: one resistance member is an ex-general of Qing regime living in exile in Hong Kong who fights for survival; the other is a gambling-debt burdened policeman Shen Chongyang (Donnie Yen) who first sells his skills to the imperial force for money, then turns against its henchmen on the day of the operation. Shen fights valiantly to his death after deterring the advancement of the fierce assassins. His mind change is nonetheless embedded in a cliché of family melodrama rather than reveal any traces of popular crime thrillers: the gambling addict Shen abandoned his wife (Fan Bingbing) in a downward spiral, but determines to redeem his manhood and sense of honor by joining the bodyguard operation on his own after his ex-wife tells him that the lovely young girl living with her in Li Yutang's house is their daughter.

Not unlike Shen, the bodyguards partaking in the protection operation have little awareness of the political meaning of their action. Many do so to repay the tycoon Li's kindness. Alliance based on well-informed conviction is restricted to the young man Li Chongguang (Wang Po-chieh). As tycoon Li's teenage son, Chongguang embraces his teacher's ideals and chooses to forsake his privileged status by happily performing as stand-in for Dr. Sun in a decoy sedan procession to draw the assassin's attention away from the true Dr. Sun. This youthful passion contrasts with his father's cautious involvement, and has a direct opposite in the assassin team leader Yan Xiao-guo (Hu Jun) who pledges allegiance to Empress Dowager and the Qing regime. Yan's men catch and imprison teacher Chen Xiaobai. Coincidentally, Yan has received a Western education with teacher Chen Xiaobai, and he shows respect by delivering a plate of food to his teacher who refuses to eat anything. A brief conversation between him and teacher Chen reveals Yan's views: a modern education has given him reasons to mistrust the Western ways. The opposition between embracing and opposing ideals of liberal democracy refers to an off-screen debate regarding a Western road and a Chinese road that is century-long and ongoing. The opposing views receive no new insight in the film, which uses them as the basis for conflict when two sides engage in

life-and-death fights. Chongguang's inescapable death can be taken to carry a recognition of the imperial force's relentlessness, and also the film's lack of hope towards substantial change carried by the next generation.

The co-produced film makes cross-cultural references while performing cultural renationalization. Working as a star vehicle, it has young mainland singer Li Yuchun playing the daughter of the exiled general, and transnational martial arts star Donnie Yen engaging in a spectacular fight with Vietnamese-American kick-boxer and fighter champion Cung Le. A full-hour action sequence is set to match the film time as a device with precedents in *24* (2001–2010), an American television drama series, and *High Noon* (1952), a classic Western. Overstatement and mimicry carry over from previous action movies: two instances are ceaseless martial arts fights for an hour, and hyperdense business signs filling up the frames to make a fictive Central District of nineteenth century Hong Kong out of a movie set built in the mainland. A rickshaw rolling haplessly down a stone-paved street gives homage to the Odessa Steps sequence in *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) and makes allusion to the killing of those holding hopes for change. Commemoration of the 1911 Chinese Revolution is gestured by individual captions in the film frame placed next to each dying bodyguard making a virtual connection to actual historical figures. Each caption contains the person's name, years of birth and death, and native place that match not the actor's biography, but those of the actual heroes and martyrs of the 1911 Revolution event. More names at the end are identified with the uprisings that ended the Qing regime's rule in 1911.

A mixed-genre film, *American Dreams in China* (hereafter *Dreams*) is a coming-of-age story, a friendship melodrama, and a rags-to-riches fantasy tale. The aforementioned termination of production plans in Cinema Popular has not stopped Peter Chan from seeking mainland screenwriters and mainland actors to take up key positions working for him in making the film. The story also has resonance in the partnership imaginary in *American Dreams in China* that is overlooked in the many e-reviews of the film's messages.²⁵ Organized around the story of three ordinary students of a university in Beijing whose different paths in life come to converge in the cooperation of a highly profitable English language school that eventually acquired an IPO on NASDAQ, the film strikes a strong note to the emphasis put on enterprise success during three decades of China's overall economic boom. Critics identify the film's use of lawsuit to frame the story as a borrowed one from *Social Network* (David Fincher, 2010) and describe it as an "enterprise creation" history (*chuang ye shi*). Peter Chan appeared in an enterprise-based 2013 conference of the Boao Forum for Asia and won Best Director in the government's 2013 Golden Rooster awards. Its story of entrepreneurial success through the ups and downs of three decades of incessant development has an actual counterpart in a well-known "Xin Dongfang" (New East) English-language school with national branches providing preparation classes for tens of thousands of Chinese students to get good scores in Education Testing Services run examinations (TOEFL, GRE, and ACT are mentioned). Scenes in the film incorporate motivation speeches and attach a

can-do entrepreneurial spirit to ethnic pride. Its rags-to-riches story is accepted as a reflection of China's rise in the world economy and a new horizon of success that everyone can take as their dreams. This projected horizon nevertheless received a clear-eyed reception from the critics who read the dialogue that admits its lie: it is a business in mass deception with "chicken soup" sold to young students anxious about failure.

The partnership imaginary in this film has several social references that sustain public interest in the story. First, the country versus city backgrounds of business partners Cheng Dongqing (Wang Xiaoming) and Meng Xiaojin (Deng Chao) acknowledges a wide rift between the resources that each young man has which accounts for their difference in confidence and sense of entitlement in life. A bowing Cheng Dongqing in front of villagers who lend him money to attend university marks a lowly beginning that continues to characterize the experiences of exploitation and humiliation as a teacher. Meng Xiaojin's bold rebuttal of a teacher for imparting second-hand knowledge, adding to him being the first of the friends to enjoy a smooth exit to study and work in the US makes a clear contrast. His return to China after facing the dimmed prospects of upward social mobility not only has a tint of melancholy, the humbling reversal of fortune reflects a commonly held view towards the "overseas returnees" (*hai gui*, with the same sound as "sea turtle"). Initially shown with proportionate comic exaggerations and pity, Cheng Dongqing's inferior feelings, secret romantic longings, exploitation by senior members in the university, and expulsion from the state employment system make the very stuff of rejection that appeals to a massive audience stuck with scanty resources and limited opportunities. A man who has never left China (nicknamed *tu bie*, or "earthly turtle") but who finally achieves immense wealth, status, and an uncommon popular recognition out of persistence, hard work, and conservative management delivers a promise that supports the belief in a Chinese road to prosperity. The contrast between the overseas returnee and the indigenous businessman imply the strength of the partnership and a collusion with the official "Chinese Dream" of success rather than the tensions that have continued in the relationship.

Second, partners sharing experiences of failure due to personal, cultural, and systemic restrictions make as good a start as any. The intersecting stories are connected through the use of voice-off to add an interior dimension to what amounts to three personal testimonies on overcoming anxiety, gaining confidence, and living with limited prospects. A montage series of lectures and individual classes maintain the external aspect of work taken up by the young entrepreneurs. Cheng Dongqing develops a pedagogical style that integrates his inferior feelings to motivate a growing audience of young men and women from similarly humble backgrounds seeking assurance. Getting over shame as an inhibiting emotion takes the Freudian route of talking cure that incorporates every personal experience of limitations and failure into English words and phrases that make effective English-language acquisition. Meng Xiaojin, who has stage fright, chooses to give

personal coaching sessions to timid students so they can face up to the officials in visa application interviews. He also prompts Wang Yang (Tong Dawei) to incorporate his experience of dating an American girlfriend into conversation lessons. An unlicensed school operating in an empty state factory that cobbles the skills and experiences of its teachers together appeals to the viewer as one familiar scenario of the Chinese road to globalization. In the process, an indigenous venture is seen to grow out of a peasant boy's unmovable resilience as much as from an overseas returnee's American experience. A performance-based validation of Cheng and Meng is complemented by an adaptive attitude as an option speaking to the less competitive as well: apparently the most carefree among the three friends – having worn long hair, dated an American girlfriend, and written poetry in the 1980s, Wang Yang has been going with the flow. He not truly counter-cultural, however, for when circumstance changes, he cuts his long hair, burns his poems, and settles down with an easy-going woman.

Third, popular songs evoke nostalgia for the 1980s as an immensely creative time for music, movies, and politics. Among the nine songs, two of them allude to the idealism of an era. The music of “L’Internationale” evokes the memory of Tian’anmen student movement and solidarity across the student-worker divide in the face of forbidden powers for those who have gone through the event. Suppression of any image or mentioning of the event is a sign of enforced amnesia and its voluntary self-perpetuation. This tendency continues with the scene of Wang Dawei singing “The Boundless Sea and Sky” at a karaoke right after he and



Figure 1.2 *American Dreams in China* (Peter Chan, 2013): A returnee (Peter Chan and Hong Kong?) getting trimmed in a partnership ritual.



Figure 1.3 *Drug War* (Johnnie To, 2012) has an allegorical image of an involuntary partnership of death.

Cheng count their first stack of student fees and are feeling affluent. The song's lyrics refer to giving up one's ideals and going with the flow, which coincides with the young men's move to running language education classes for profit. Written by the late band singer and composer Wong Ka-kui, who insisted on keeping artistic integrity in the midst of a money-crazed entertainment scene, the song also calls to mind the tragedy when Ka-kui died an untimely death in Japan shortly after he gave in to making regular industry performances.²⁶ For an audience that knows the references, the songs do more than provide a negligible music background to a fantasy narrative. The cultural memory that the songs evoke inadvertently serve as a measure against the film's amnesia and its many compromises.

Watchful Partners, Hidden Currents

Peter Chan set the partners within performance-based goals so his film's imaginary is aligned with the official horizon in China's managed cultural globalization, with success measured by an IPO in NASDAQ. Johnnie To's *Drug War* has a different scenario on partnership by putting Milkyway crime thrillers to a co-production setting. It tells a story of a Hong Kong capitalist (drug) dealer Timmy Choi (Louis Koo) in the mainland turning into a police informant to escape the death penalty. Choi delivers his Hong Kong and mainland partners in crime to a police operation that is efficient, unmovable, and covers all locations with surveillance cameras and support. He survives the gun battles that kill his partners but fails to walk away for,

unbeknownst to him, the police captain Zhang (Sun Honglei) handcuffed himself to Choi's leg before he dies. A dead body of a state policeman chained tightly to one leg of a wounded Hong Kong informant who has gotten all of his allies killed makes a horrific, haunting kind of involuntary partnership. More grim and trenchant compared to the instance of a symbolic haircut in *American Dreams*, this allegorical image negotiates one cinema's narrative strategies in a different, restrictive co-production setting without mirroring compliance as the way to success. Still bound by repetitions of previous generic approaches and narrative strategies, the scene holds together an abiding cynicism with distance from unconscious self-alienation to make room for alertness to insidious tendencies.

The alliances, allegiances, betrayals, and deadly connections enacted in the above features have a corollary in the main issues and concerns of co-production. The partnership imaginary in these middlebrow co-production films is enacted through genre idioms as well as reinventions of previous Hong Kong films, including those produced by the same companies or directed by the same director who has relocated to the mainland. Taken as an extension of a small industry's historical cross-border performances and flexible accumulation practices, this imaginary cannot be reduced to co-production relations alone. A cultural memory of narrative strategies, creative film crafting, and transregional negotiation of the Hong Kong's colonial era restrictions and industry limitations does not vanish. Instead, this cultural memory is entangled with a retroactive identity of this cinema which infuses the co-produced films of Hong Kong and China in a particular manifestation of cultural globalization that is not entirely that of Hong Kong or of China. Partnership imaginary that engages different spatial dynamics and cultural memory can reinforce the chances of breaking out from previous successes and present misses, and that is yet to be realized.

Notes

- 1 On 1 July 1997, Hong Kong received the official name "Hong Kong Special Administrative Region" (HKSAR) after the People's Republic of China (PRC) assumed political sovereignty over the territory. It is territorially correct to speak of a "HKSAR" cinema. In this essay, I use "Hong Kong" as shorthand to refer to its cinema in pre- and post-1997 times. I adopt the use of "Chinese mainland" and "China" to refer to the PRC mainland (*zhongguo dalu*) that excludes the territory of Hong Kong. With co-produced films constituting the largest number of annual productions engaging most of the Hong Kong directors, one takes note of the changing referents of China–Hong Kong co-production and Hong Kong cinema. The "co-production of films" is now a historical practice and it may become outdated as a result of the rise of China's commercial cinema.
- 2 By 2014, up to 45 service sectors in the Chinese mainland had been placed under CEPA's liberalization clauses. The Hong Kong Trade Development Council's report on

- the sectors, and the inclusion of the financial sector, can be viewed in Ho, Dickson (2013): <http://economists-pick-research.hktdc.com/business-news/article/Research-Articles/CEPA-Supplement-X-and-Hong-Kong-s-financial-and-distribution-services-sectors/rp/en/1/1X000000/1X09VOV5.htm>. Accessed January 1, 2015.
- 3 See Zhang (2008); also Zhan (2013). The former includes such terms as “China consciousness” (*zhongguo yishi*), “same root same origin” (*tong geng tong yuan*), “cooperation and mutual assimilation” (*he zuo gong rong*). The latter takes the co-production films of 2009 to 2012 as showing “deep integration and assimilation” (*shen du rong he*) with films that show the directors and films have moved closer to the mainland culture (*neidi wen hua*) and values (*jia zhi guan*). (Except for the essay titles, the individual English terms are my translation.)
 - 4 The mainland internet film site “Mtimes” published a special section entitled “Do Not Call us Hong Kong Directors anymore” with a list of relocated Hong Kong directors and their co-production films. The account is mainland-based regarding the composite process of filmmaking in various locales. A table of names of the notable directors and their films are given in Table 1.1. See Nai Hui and An Di Yao Rao (2013).
 - 5 By “imaginary” I refer to the ways imagination, not just monetary gains or economic reason, figures in both the practice and the representation of co-production practice. Taking from Benedict Anderson’s “imagined communities,” Charles Taylor wrote: “The social imaginary is not a set of ‘ideas’; rather, it is what enables, through making sense of, the practices of a society” (Taylor 2002, p. 91).
 - 6 Through the World Trade Organization, China agreed to raise the annual quota of imported Hollywood films from 20 to 34 (<http://www.filmbiz.asia/news/china-to-expand-film-import-quotas>. Accessed January 1, 2015). The actual number of imported films into the PRC each year is above this number if one counts the television sales of older feature movies, legal DVD and pirated DVD distribution, and pirate web-casts. When all legal and illegal venues are included, according to a Chinese internet source, the total can be over a thousand per year. See <http://news.mtime.com/2012/10/11/1499044-3.html>. Accessed February 19, 2014.
 - 7 As Wendy Su has pointed out, Chinese critics and writers use “Hollywood movies” as a generic term referring to a unified “Other” when talking about the latter’s threat on the PRC film industry. See Su (2011).
 - 8 For the business profile of Media Asia Group, see <http://www.mediaasia.com/en/about/group-structure>. Accessed January 20, 2015.
 - 9 For the business profile of Emperor Group, see <http://www.emperorgroup.com/en/Index.php>. Accessed January 20, 2015.
 - 10 The forming of conglomerates with subsidiary companies has altered the ecology of film production in Hong Kong and such is the tendency in the mainland. Profiles of Emperor’s CEO Albert Yeung are available at <http://www.hkcinemagic.com/en/people.asp?id=5300> and <http://www.emperorgroup.com/en/ourbusinesses.php?id=4>. Accessed January 1, 2015.
 - 11 Raymond Wong, the founder and executive director of the Mandarin group and the mastermind behind Mandarin Films’ family comedies and the *Ip Man* series (I, II), left his position to start a family-based Pegasus Entertainment Holdings company to replicate the success of production and distribution. Pegasus announced the production of *Ip Man* (III) in the spring of 2014.

- 12 For an overview of the growth of movie theaters and multiplexes in the PRC mainland, see Liu and Han (2012).
- 13 Jackie Chan's other co-owner is Sparkle Roll Group. Accordingly, the Beijing Jackie Chan-Yaolai International Cinema multiplex brought in RMB 80 million (US\$13 million) in 2010. <http://www.wantchinatimes.com/news-subclass-cnt.aspx?id=20130501000113&cid=1102>. Accessed January 1, 2015.
- 14 Wang (2007).
- 15 See also Coonan and Roxborough (2013).
- 16 David Bordwell elucidates the narrative strategies of *Drug War* and includes an interpretation by Grady Hendrix in his blog: <http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2013/07/08/mixing-business-with-pleasure-johnnie-tos-drug-war/>. Accessed January 1, 2015.
- 17 In an interview, the film's producer Chen Zhixi acknowledges the challenge of finance, culture, and restrictions coming from the government for the PRC productions. Accordingly, the quality of talents, successful marketing through social media, and direct involvement of stakeholder in the project are some of what made the film successful. <http://knowledge.ckgsb.edu.cn/2013/03/29/china/lost-in-thailands-unique-business-model>. Accessed January 1, 2015.
- 18 Studies of European co-productions can offer historical references. Throughout the 1960s, for example, studios in Italy and Spain rented out facilities and crew for Hollywood's production of epics such *The King of Kings* (1961), *El Cid* (1961), and *The Fall of the Roman Empire* (1963). Anglo-Italian co-productions with American investment brought about Michelangelo Antonioni's *Blow Up* (1966). Several director *auteurs* of New German cinema have made co-production films: *Despair* (1977) and *Querelle* (1982) both directed by Rainer Werner Fassbinder; *Hammert* (1982) and *Paris, Texas* (1984), both by Wim Wenders, and *Aguirre, the Wrath of God* (1972) and *Fitzcarraldo* (1982) both by Werner Herzog. See Bergfelder, *International Adventures: German Popular Cinema and European Co-productions in the 1960s*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2005 (53–4, 58, 240). The best-known China–US and China–Europe co-production features of the 1980s were *Empire of the Sun* and *The Last Emperor*. Bergfelder identifies key features in the co-production agreements in the German-European-American co-productions that are common in international film history. By 2011, China had signed co-production agreements with Australia, Canada, France, New Zealand, and Singapore and the numbers continue to expand. Some of the issues are discussed in Shackleton (2010).
- 19 At a panel that this writer attended during an official conference held in Beijing in 2004, several young critics working in official film institutions professed a familiarity with and love for the Hong Kong movies of the 1980s. The cyberspace is filled with personal comments on Hong Kong movies in personal blogs and reader's comments on movie pages.
- 20 A 1987 issue of Beijing-based film journal, *Contemporary Cinema* has “entertainment film” (*yu le pian*) in the feature section with extensive discussion of the characteristics of this different cinema, and the films of Hollywood and Hong Kong loom large behind the discussion. Essays on Hong Kong cinema and on co-production films make a regular presence in the journal since the 1990s. Film Festivals also played a significant role in encouraging, even enticing, the making of films that address the new subjectivities.

- 21 The stars are mixed in both films: Fan Bingbing and Tong Dawei are PRC film actors, and Maggie Cheung and Leung Ka-fai are long-time Hong Kong film actors. Eric Tsang is a native Hong Kong actor while Leon Lai is a Beijing-born Hong Kong actor.
- 22 The depiction of Hong Kong directors pitching film ideas to find investors has also appeared in *Vulgaria* (Pang Ho-cheung, 2012). The film raised controversy for its demeaning stereotype of the rich and ignorant first-time mainland investor.
- 23 According to one resource, China's internet companies Baidu, Alibaba, and Tencent engaged in e-commerce and web research provision are getting into the entertainment industry by producing digital drama series and movies for the internet users. Yu Dong is quoted as saying that Baidu, Alibaba, and Tencent will be the future employers who have famous film directors working on their movies. See Liu and Qu (2014). Also Wang, Wu and Huang (2014).
- 24 I have used the pinyin spelling for the names of protagonists. It is just as correct to use Cantonese or Hong Kong-style spelling for the names.
- 25 The Chinese internet movie site M-Time boasts of 900+ e-reviews of *American Dreams in China*. See: <http://movie.mtime.com/174760/comment.html>. Accessed January 1, 2015.
- 26 The film's nine songs are: 1. "The Boundless Sky and Sea" (海闊天空), Beyond, Hong Kong, 1993; 2. "The Girl in the Greenhouse" (花房姑娘), Cui Jian, Beijing, 1989; 3. "Rock 'N' Roll on the New Long March Road" (新長征路的上的搖滾), Cui Jian, Beijing, 1989; 4. "L'Internationale" (國際歌), Tang Dynasty, Beijing, 1991; 5. "Leaving on Jet Plane, John Denver" (cover: Yoyo Sham in the film), US, 1966; 6. "Live a Dashing Life" (瀟灑走一回), Sally Yeh, Hong Kong, 1991; 7. "The Outside World" (外面的世界), Chyi Chin, Taiwan, 1994; 8. "The Same Moonlight" (一樣的月光), Julie Sue, Taiwan, 1993; 9. "The Story of Time" (光陰的故事), Lo Dayu, Taiwan, 1981.

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The Urban Maze

*Crisis and Topography in Hong Kong Cinema*¹

Esther M.K. Cheung

Crisis, Topophilia, and the Emergence of Millennial Films

Situating the new millennial films vis-à-vis several critical turns in the representations of the city in Hong Kong cinema, this chapter aims to examine the cinematic city as an episteme that grounds our knowledge of political, cultural, and socio-economic dynamics of Hong Kong society within a complex global–national–local network.² It is argued that the urban cinema provokes critical discourses on central cultural problems – urbanity, globality, and postcoloniality – as well as the “conditions of their possibility” (Foucault 1966/1994) which pertain to the various stages of the transformation of the city. In this chapter, I invoke the critical paradigm of “the crisis cinema” for the study of Hong Kong cinema, arguing that there is a close correlation between crisis, urbanity, and film as cultural text (Cheung 2004: 248–271).

Integral to ideological film criticism, crisis finds its root in Marxism, where political economy is often emphasized. Some critics of Hong Kong cinema who have applied this perspective mainly focus on the way in which film as commodity epitomizes late capitalism and its cultural logic (Stokes and Hoover 1999). This approach, however, has neglected the plurality of causes and the cultural and creative role of film. Since the emphasis is on the industrial aspects of film, little attention has been paid to the affective dimensions of a society’s culture. Informed by post-Althusserian views, the notion of crisis in question is an overdetermined trope, carrying the assumption that ideology in film is inseparable from the history of the era in question. Be it economic, social, cultural, or political, a crisis encodes a film text, and it follows that the relationship between film and history is a

“process of discursive transcoding,” as Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner aptly put it (1990: 12). Indeed, in the history of Hong Kong cinema, the crisis-ridden city is a trope that is both reflective and signifying (Cheung 2004: 250–251). To the extent that film images are expressive and symptomatic of history, they can also be intricately bound up with the disintegration of ideology, and most importantly, the reconstitution of experience at the level of filmic representations (Hansen 1993). Inherent in this trope is an aesthetics and politics of representation hinged on the double textures of the urban space, which is concrete and mythic, historical and allegorical (Abbas 1997; Donald 1999; Cheung 2009). I argue that it is the mythic and allegorical layers of film images that invite viewers’ interpretations, producing discursive spaces where a politics of representation can be enacted.

In the wake of the 1997 handover, “crisis cinema” as a critical paradigm entails three fundamental issues in earlier scholarly studies: Hong Kong’s reintegration with China, film’s relation to global capitalism and transnational movements, as well as the cinematic city being perceived as both a psycho-social and cultural space. Built on these issues, Hong Kong cinema has been variously named as a “quasi-national cinema” (Chu 2003), “transnational cinema” (Lu 1997; Marchetti 1998) and “crisis cinema” (Stokes and Hoover 1999; Cheung and Chu 2004). In the new millennium, I argue that “crisis cinema” continues to usefully inform the analysis of film productions bound up with urban issues within a global–national–local nexus. In this light, “crisis cinema” may still encompass critical debates on industrial productions, the transnational and the impact of the national on the local; nevertheless, its new spotlight on the emergent structure of feeling associated with the post-handover ethos has ushered a paradigmatic shift. While the new films in the 2000s provide a rich archive of urban images which evoke different styles of imagining, what ties them together is what Tuan Yi-fu might call “topophilia” – “an affective bond between people and place” (Tuan 1974). What figures centrally in these films is the trope of an affective locality.

Beyond Tuan’s transhistorical and phenomenological take, however, the affective bond manifested in the new millennial films is rendered as a specific state of mind in the rapidly changing post-handover Hong Kong milieu. Characterized by a mixture of local demands for historical preservation and critical discourses on urban reconstruction led by real-estate developers, this milieu witnessed an awakened awareness of neoliberal encroachments on the livelihood of people in the city. One of the major concerns is as fundamental as desiring a physical home in a congested city which is incredibly tiny and impossibly pricy. What is worse is that everyone living in the city witnesses the literal erasure of their tangible homes. The speedy demolition of old neighborhoods and buildings is a constant fact. Pang Ho-cheung’s cult film *Dream Home* (2010) may not be the best subject on which to base an examination of topophilia, but it shows how an average Hong Kong citizen’s humble dream can become violent and impossible, if not tragic. Named in a term coined by local critics, “real-estate hegemony” (Poon 2010; Chin 2011), this adverse condition is manifested in the constant demolition of old buildings

and neighborhoods resulting in an erasure of cultural memories. Intricately associated with this structure of feeling is a deeply rooted politicized condition. It grew out of local people's resistance to Beijing's increased hegemony and their demands for a democratization of the institutional framework of "one country, two systems" promised by the Joint Declaration of 1984. In short, a civic culture has been developing where a strong claim to cultural identity is associated with democratic demands which resist forces of renationalization and mainlandization while critiquing the government's real-estate-led policies and urban developmentalism (Szeto and Chen 2012). As part of this civic culture and an emergent structure of feeling, topophilia strengthens as more and more artists, filmmakers, and writers express their affections for Hong Kong's quotidian lifestyles, waning local customs, disappearing old neighborhoods and the like.

Such an affective bond between people and place is most commonly found in new films with nostalgic elements. In their different ways, Derek Kwok and Clement Cheng's *Gallants* (2010), Alex Law's *Echoes of the Rainbow* (2010), and Clement Cheng and Yan Yan Mak's *Merry-Go-Round* (2010) express strong affections for a bygone era, disappearing old neighborhoods as well as old ways of life. Critics have called them "the new nostalgic films" – differentiating them from the nostalgia films which appeared before the 1997 handover (Shum 2011). While the three films are easily identified by either a double temporal structure or the sentimentalization of an earlier epoch, there are also nostalgic allusions found in action films, festival comedies, urban romances, and short films. From the portrayal of old Hong Kong in *Bruce Lee, My Brother* (Yip Wai-man and Manfred Wong, 2010) and *Ip Man 2* (Wilson Yip, 2010) to the recycling of comic elements from *72 Tenants* in *I Love Hong Kong* (Eric Tsang and Chung Shu-kai, 2011), there is a shared intent to reconstruct Hong Kong as a place through cinematic nostalgia. The memory lane conjured up in Herman Yau's short *Fried Glutinous Rice* (2010) evokes bitter sweet remembrances through food, portraying Hong Kong as a disappearing city. Even in films set in contemporary Hong Kong, for example, Johnnie To's *Sparrow* (2008), Ivy Ho's *Crossing Hennessy* (2010), independent filmmaker Jessey Tsang's *Big Blue Lake* (2011) as well as first-timer Lai Yan-chi's *1+1* (2011), the emotive significance of Hong Kong as a place is emphasized. Last but not least, the quotidian ambience in the low-cost public housing estates in veteran Ann Hui's *The Way We Are* (2008) fosters an intimate relationship between memory and place for ordinary people. In dialogue with the First and Second New Waves, altogether these films almost form a third wave in the history of Hong Kong cinema, which critics call "The SAR New Wave" (Szeto and Chen 2012). In this chapter, I refer to them as "new topographical" films to accentuate their shared topophilia as a new structure of feeling in post-handover Hong Kong. Invoking the trope of topography, I intend to emphasize the significance of locality and the cultural implications of its cinematic urban landscape. In the Western tradition of literary and philosophical writings, as denoted by its etymology, *topo* and *graphein*, "topography" is about the writing of a place (Miller 1995). When transported to film, the urban topography in new

films features a city of nostalgia, localism, and community activism that arose in a specific moment and cultural space of post-handover Hong Kong. While a crisis moment in this historical juncture is explicitly denoted, its urban topography connotes creatively how the city is threatened, acted upon, and claimed.

Crisis Cinema and Its Critical Turns

The above quick survey of the new millennial films does not mean that a sense of place is a new phenomenon in Hong Kong cinema. Quite the contrary. Critics in earlier scholarly studies have remarked that there is a close correlation between placeness and urbanity in cinematic imaginations. In other words, the representations of Hong Kong as a city are always bound up with historical transformations, whether abrupt or subtle, grand or small, global or local. In his discussion of Hong Kong films from the 1950s to the 1990s, Leung Ping-kwan argues that the formation of Hong Kong urban cinema after the 1967 riots, alongside other cultural texts, has produced “a politics of place” (Leung 2004: 381). He observes that various constructions of the city relate closely to the filmmakers’ own cultural identities (2004: 369). Leung aptly cites the postwar films of the 1950s and 60s as examples. In those films, the city of Hong Kong is often imagined as an opposite to the “country” in a dualistic sense, set against both the countryside and the nation-state. This kind of binary opposition articulates an exilic and transient ethos shared by the southbound filmmakers who left China during and after 1949. Be they left-wing or right-wing, residing in the then-British colony they yearned for a distant homeland in mainland China while expressing a negative critique of city life in Hong Kong. Fung Fung’s *The Kid* (1950) starring Bruce Lee as the youngster named Cheung is a case in point. It tells the story of Cheung’s misfortune in a slum in Hong Kong with insufficient education and welfare. The film ends with Cheung’s uncle, as a representation of a good adult, taking him to their home town in China with the hope of starting a new life.³ Undoubtedly, in films like *Save Your Water Supply* (Poon Bing-kuen, 1954) and *In the Face of Demolition* (Li Tie, 1953) a community spirit is clearly present, although the focus is more on interpersonal relations and social injustice than cultural politics.

From the late 1960s to the 1990s Hong Kong cinema witnessed a critical turn from this strand of imaginary. When the postwar generation of filmmakers who were born or bred in Hong Kong came of age and made their debuts, Hong Kong as a place took shape in their films, frequently negatively depicted. The internationally renowned Hong Kong New Cinema, represented mainly by Tsui Hark, Ann Hui, Stanley Kwan, Wong Kar-wai, Fruit Chan and the like, captures how the urban experience is intricately associated with social and political instability, namely the 1997 handover. Cinematic tropes such as the crime city, the haunted house, the ghostly city, and the ephemeral city are widely discussed in earlier

scholarships (Abbas 1997; Lim 2001; Cheung 2004, 2009, 2010; Leung 2004). From the First Wavers' debuts *Dangerous Encounters of the First Kind* (Tsui Hark, 1980) and *The Secret* (Anne Hui, 1979) to *Rouge* (Stanley Kwan, 1987), *Chungking Express* (Wong Kar-wai, 1994), and *Made in Hong Kong* (Fruit Chan, 1997) in later years, the spotlighted locality is incessantly traumatized by spatial-temporal shifts on a global-local scale. On the other hand, however abrupt or transitional the city is, there is always an urge or tendency to re-enchant a sense of belonging, to nurture feelings of at-homeness as well as to turn the city into a "site of struggle," as it were. In fact the 1990s witnessed the emergence of a dual crisis. In addition to the sense of uncertainty triggered off by 1997, Hong Kong was also actively interfacing with larger world outside, experiencing unprecedented transition from colonialism and imperialism to multinational or global capitalism (Lu 1997; Marchetti 1998; Yau 2001). There is a physical and metaphysical loss of home resulting from unprecedented historical events such as the handover and the migratory nature of modern and postmodern life experience. In the midst of this kind of erosion of traditional identity, there are efforts to reconfigure the city as a positive space where broken social relations can be reconstituted. While Hong Kong cinema is not known by its memoir and autobiographical films, one witnesses various attempts to accentuate the experience of growing up and a sense of belonging to a locality – from Ann Hui's *Song of the Exile* (1990) and *As Time Goes By* (1997) to Stanley Kwan's *Still Love You After All These Years* (1997) and Fruit Chan's *Little Cheung* (2000). In short, an affective relation to a place can be perceived as a form of safeguard against change and threat (Williams 1997; Leung 2004).

Intriguingly the opposite depictions of the city are in fact two sides of the same coin. I venture to say that one exists within, and as the effect of, the other. In the tradition of humanistic geography scholars often distinguish "place" from "space" without articulating the interrelationship between the two within the context of urban modernity and capitalism. Tuan Yi-fu and Edward Relph, for example, argue that "place" stands for pause and is concrete, while "space" refers to mobility and is abstract, privileging place over space (Tuan 1977; Relph 1976). Their phenomenological view has been challenged by radical geographers and cultural critics who consider "place" and "home" as a process, constructed as a response to external threat. Place and home are better understood as process and crisis-ridden. Marxist geographer David Harvey observes that the significance of place has increased under the conditions of flexible accumulation and postmodernity in the history of neoliberalism (Harvey 1996). David Morely and Kevin Robbins also argue similarly, asserting that "there is a desire to be at home in the new and disorientating global space Home in a world of expanding horizons and dissolving boundaries" is constantly being shattered and reconstructed (Morely and Robbins 1995: 10).

In a similar, dialectic sense, the new topographical films, notable for a mixture of nostalgia, localism, and enthusiasm for cultural heritage, feature the city of Hong Kong as a crisis-ridden one. If placeness can only be sensed in "a chiaroscuro

of setting, landscape, ritual, routine, personal experience, encounter,” as Edward Relph defines it (1976: 8), “place” in these new Hong Kong films is a multi-faceted phenomenon fully immersed in political and socio-economic mutations. The cinematic city is both a location and a locale, experienced through fixity and mobility in the postcolonial urban space of Hong Kong. On the one hand, as an imagined place notwithstanding, the crisis city in the new topographical films is constantly represented as a location rooted in historically and culturally specific experiences. It is home to many where one’s mundane everyday life takes place. Its rootedness provides a point of anchor from which characters in the films look at the world, grapple with their own position in the order of things, and develop a community spirit. Topophilia evoked through a sense of pastness in nostalgia films is thus often an effective means of producing a spirit of placeness, often-times through the process of naming. Be it an old street – Wing Lee Street (*Echoes of the Rainbow*, *Merry-Go-Round*), a familiar region – Wan Chai (*Crossing Hennessy*), Central (*Sparrow*), and Sai Kung (*Big Blue Lake*), or an ordinary low-cost apartment in Tin Shui Wai (*The Way We Are*), the city is affectively imagined as hospitable, home-like, and communal. On the other hand, the cinematic city is constantly invoked as a site situated within fluxes and dynamic processes, sometimes as a threatened place in crisis. Viewers are constantly drawn to the mental and psychological state of the urban dwellers in the films, witnessing the crisis city imagined as a site of erotic encounter, a field of struggle as well as an aesthetic and critical response to socio-economic and political changes. Positing such a spectatorship has opened up discursive spaces where a sense of belonging to Hong Kong as a locality is negotiating with tidal changes in the eventful years after the 1997 handover.

The Eventful Years After 1997

To historicize this newly emergent structure of feeling, let us turn to the growth of a civic culture after 1997. Since the handover, local inhabitants have become more and more proactive in voicing out their anti-government views and frequently taken the street to express their discontents. With an increased number of young people coming of age, they often speak against the encroachment of neo-liberalism as well as the PRC’s political influence in Hong Kong. This momentum has escalated especially since the SARS epidemic in 2003, an eventful year in which Hong Kong was plagued by an infectious disease and witnessed the resignation of the city’s first Chief Executive, Tung Chee-hwa. Around the same time, the Urban Renewal Authority announced its project to redevelop Lee Tung Street which is locally known as “Wedding Card Street” because of the many printing shops in the street, some of which had a history of over fifty years. The redevelopment project involved the demolition of the old buildings and construction of modern

high-rises on the same site. When more and more buildings are destroyed by the bulldozers, a sense of home is constantly eroded. Despite public opposition, all of the buildings were torn down in December 2007. The opposition movement that took place between 2003 and 2007 was initiated by residents of the street as well as being supported by activists who considered their opposition to be a way of countering urban reconstruction led by real-estate developers and speculators. Such social movements reached their peak when activists started to preserve two historical landmarks of Hong Kong public space. Although these endeavors failed in preventing the demolition, the aftermath of such activism not only widely publicized the importance of cultural heritage but also drew the government's attention to cultural policy and urban planning, the need for public consultation, long-term problems regarding real-estate hegemony as well as debates on developmentalism and historical preservation.

In this eventful decade, Hong Kong's cultural space was also drastically redefined by the "closer" relationship with China. After the SARS outbreak in 2003, more and more independent tourists from the mainland visited Hong Kong, thanks to the new Independent Tourist Scheme set up by the government to boost Hong Kong's badly afflicted economy. At the same time, the Hong Kong film industry underwent dramatic reorganization as it continued to wane in the international film market. As more and more filmmakers moved northward with the establishment of the Close Economic Partnership Arrangement (CEPA) and started making co-productions, Hong Kong's sense of place diminished significantly, because what was considered appealing to mainland Chinese audience was either epic costume dramas or martial arts films. Hong Kong filmmaker Peter Chan, for example, declared that he had stopped singing his explicit love songs about Hong Kong when he started making *Perhaps Love* (2005) and *The Warlords* (2007). If there are filmic inflections on Hong Kong in these co-productions, the relationship can only be tangential, if not allegorical. Against this dominant trend of co-production, some of the films surveyed at the outset of this chapter can be traced back to their industrial context of production.⁴ It is important to note that, with the exception of *Ip Man 2* and a few others, many of these films do not fall into the category of Hong Kong-China co-productions. *Merry-Go-Round*, *I Love Hong Kong*, *Fried Glutinous Rice*, *Sparrow*, *Crossing Hennessy*, *Big Blue Lake*, *1+1*, and *The Way We Are* were all produced by Hong Kong companies. Some of them were commercially released while others are shorts or independent productions funded by government funds. Despite their diversity, it is not coincidental that the centrality of Hong Kong as a locality matters. Although *Gallants* and *Echoes of the Rainbow* involve mainland Chinese companies,⁵ they both focus on subject matter that is clearly connected to Hong Kong rather than the mainland. It is within this larger cultural scene that this corpus of topographical films arose. With an affective bond between people and place, they put the spotlight back onto locality, showing how locality is imagined vis-à-vis the forces that threaten to destroy, limit, and transform it.

Topophilia in the Crisis City

Despite their explicit local and historical references, topophilia and representations of Hong Kong as a place, however, the new topographical films do not sit within the domain of documentary realism. Nor do they explicitly reflect and advocate any activist agenda. The crisis-ridden city in these films is real and historical as well as allegorical and at times surreal. It wavers between fact and fiction, pertaining to James Donald's "mythic city" (1999) where the anthropological and the tangible weigh as equally as the mythic and the imaginative. To decipher this crisis city in the post-handover milieu, I focus on two sets of film that have given prominence to the significance of Hong Kong as a locality. The first category mediates the trope of a threatened place through cinematic nostalgia while the second group turns to a mixed style of realism to depict topophilia in an everyday milieu; in both types of film, the profundity of ordinary people and their quotidian ethos is heavily accentuated in an urban maze bound up with multifarious mutations.

Cinematic Nostalgia

In the new topographical films, cinematic nostalgia plays an important role in mediating the city's crisis consciousness. By cinematic nostalgia, I do not refer to either specific genres, for example, costume dramas, or to characteristic filmic features such as a double temporal structure. Instead my analysis will focus on a selection of films in which topophilia is integral to the style of imagining the city of Hong Kong in crisis. This special feature is in sharp contrast with earlier nostalgia films. Referring to the films of the 1980s and 90s, critics commonly observe that a mode of cinematic nostalgia characterized by a sense of anxiety and a yearning for the past is part of a socio-cultural phenomenon associated with the uncertainty of the 1997 handover (Chow 1993; Abbas 1997; Chan 2000; Cheung 2010). Explicitly coined by Rey Chow, this mode of "postcolonial nostalgia" is mediated by film-making as a response to the historical situation of the 1997 issue in its cinematic representation. Central to this discourse is the question of authenticity and historicity. As Natalia Chan summarizes succinctly, nostalgia films present history as stylized and allegorical, embodying an alternative historicity which contrasts with the sense of authenticity in historical films (Chan 2000). This kind of historicity ironically signifies what Fredric Jameson describes as "a collective unconscious... of trying to identify with our own present but at the same time failing to do so" (1991: 19). In other words, the discontent with the present produces an allegorical space which is more mythic than historical even when real historical locations are explicitly or realistically screened. From a pastiche-style of narrating Chinese and Hong Kong history to the reconstruction of old ways of life and the recycling of old films, the earlier nostalgia films demonstrate what Fredric Jameson describes

as the “displacement of time” and “the spatialization of the temporal” (Jameson 1988: 23). In short, cinematic nostalgia is an effective means of mediating a city in crisis which is doubly textured.

In interesting comparative light, the new millennial films have ushered a smaller-scaled nostalgic wave bearing both differences and similarities to the earlier films. There are frequent cinematic allusions and intertextual references to Hong Kong cinema or an earlier time. For example, *Gallants* recycles elements from the comic *kung fu* genre of the 1970s as well as directly borrowing the title from a New Wave film of the same title. The stylistic recreation of history through cinematic nostalgia can be easily found in *Merry-Go-Round* and *Echoes of the Rainbow*. However, unlike earlier nostalgia films, there lacks an interest in parodying grand Chinese history such as those found in Tsui Hark’s *Once Upon a Time in China II* (1992) or engaging with Shanghai in the 1930s, although some of them still refer nostalgically to an earlier epoch of Hong Kong history.⁶

Most notably, quite a few films are identified by their shared affection for a home which is threatened by real-estate-led urban developments in Hong Kong. It is not coincidental that the real-estate agent has become a notable trope in *Gallants*, *Merry-Go-Round*, and *Dream Home*, although its characterizations vary a lot from film to film. Stylistically the new films feature an imaginary where an urban landscape is constructed mostly by way of on-location realism with an intention to enhance a sense of authenticity and topophilia. While some of these examples are done with or without the naming of a location, the camera often posits a spectator who is familiar with specific places in Hong Kong. At the same time, however, the sense of historical authenticity is constantly complicated, if not undermined, by another layer of mythic references which are signifying and imaginative. It is thus through the second level of meaning that ways of responding to a crisis are imagined. In this way, a uniquely Hong Kong spatial typology with the real city intertwined with the allegorical one conjures up an urban topography that gives expression to a new structure of feeling through cinematic nostalgia and topophilia. It gives content and form to a post-handover city in crisis, highlighting the cultural significance of quotidian culture as well as everyday experiences of the ordinary people in Hong Kong.

The best example of nostalgia films with such an affective bond is Clement Cheng and Yan Yan Mak’s *Merry-Go-Round*, which portrays a city in crisis through a double temporal structure. Commissioned by the charity organization Tung Wah Group of Hospitals to commemorate its 140th anniversary, the film follows the intersecting paths of three characters: a drug addict Ah Nam, also named Merry, who is suffering from leukemia; a herbal physician Yu Bingti also named Eva; and her nephew Allen Yu, a real estate agent. When Ah Nam decides to come back to Hong Kong to understand more about life and death, she coincidentally befriends Bingti who has returned to stop Allen selling the old family business. It just happens that Allen and Ah Nam had developed their friendship on the internet. Finding a job in the Tung Wah Coffin Home, Ah Nam becomes an assistant to Lam San,

the caretaker. It is later revealed that Ah Nam resembles Lam's ex-lover from the 1930s, who happens to be Bingti. As the film unfolds, we follow Bingti and Lam's consciousness through a series of long flashbacks reminiscing their unfulfilled love affair in the good old days. Harking back to an early era, the film reminds viewers of popular nostalgia films such as Stanley Kwan's *Rouge* and *Center Stage* (1991).

Undoubtedly the rather contrived film plot seems to depend too much on coincidences to tie together the multiple strands of narrative and the double temporal structure. The diverse elements in the film are indeed not cohesive enough. But as a commissioned project, it does attempt to parallel the history of the charity organization with the history of Hong Kong, depicting the city as both home as well as a space of Chinese diaspora. Partly set in San Francisco, the film narrates the stories of diasporic Chinese, among which the actual history of Chinese coolies is mentioned alongside the fictional story of Bingti's pursuit of dream and female independence. Most of the film scenes, however, are set in the Tung Wah Coffin Home in the Western District in Hong Kong. A real location and a cultural heritage, the Coffin Home was once home to many overseas Chinese whose coffins were temporarily housed on their way back to mainland China during the war-torn years from the 1930s to the 1950s.⁷ In the film, the coffin of Bingti's grandfather, among others, is awaiting its homecoming trip.

Cinematically the Coffin Home is pictured as both a historical site as well as a mythic space for coincidences to occur. On the one hand, the use of on-location realism enhances the historical authenticity of the cultural heritage. Following Ah Nam's observation, the camera takes viewers on a tour through the Coffin Home as if they were visitors to the cultural heritage. The heritage is depicted as a peaceful, quiet, and picturesque place embodying humanitarian and philanthropic values such as care and concern. These are also virtues that the characters seek to embrace. Insofar as the Coffin Home is a resting place for some diasporic Chinese, no matter how temporary that may be, Hong Kong is then evoked not only as a stopover but also a home.

On the other hand, associated with this theme of homecoming, a nostalgic mood of melancholy takes viewers beyond the historical experience of the Chinese diaspora and philanthropy. This strand of sentiment helps to spotlight Hong Kong as a transient home caught up in an ontological and cultural crisis. While both Ah Nam and Bingti literally come back to Hong Kong for their different purposes, all the characters including Allen and Lam are finding ways to deal with their own past traumas. In one way or another, all of them mourn the passing of time, ruminating on their sense of loss. As an actual location of coincidences, the Coffin Home also allegorizes a cultural space which is subject to the threat of death and the erasure of cultural memories, partly caused by the incessant processes of urban renewal. Assigning Allen the role of a real agent is a deliberate design. He belongs to the new generation who does not see the need to continue the traditional business of herbal medicine to which his great aunt Bingti is dedicated. One of incidents which puts them in touch with each other is Bingti's attempt to stop Allen from selling their

herbal shop, an implicit critique of the urban developmentalism that erases cultural memories. The film constantly conveys an affective bond between people and place by showing glimpses of the old streets, old shops, waning businesses, derelict neighborhoods, and old ways of life in the Sheung Wan area. Among all these, scenes at Wing Lee Street where old tenement and squatter houses which were once subject to urban renewal become an important backdrop for a drama of care and concern to unfold. It is interesting to note that the filmmakers shot the nostalgic scenes of the 1930s in the historical preservation sites (*diaolou*) in the southern province of Guangdong to create a mythic, nostalgic ambience. With such nostalgic remembrances, the film's topophilia overshadows its tone of melancholia and death, reaching beyond the locality of Hong Kong. In this way, the cinematic locality that is conjured up is a composite space of multiple histories and spaces.

Topophilia and Nostalgia Appropriated

In contrast to the melancholic mood in *Merry-Go-Round*, Derek Kwok and Clement Cheng's *Gallants* portrays a city in crisis in a comic style. Described as "a genre movie cocktail," the film combines comedy, martial arts, and character drama. It was popularly and critically received, garnering a few Hong Kong film awards. Set in modern-day Hong Kong, it begins with Leung King-cheung, a real-estate agent, being sent on a mission to a village in the New Territories to deal with a land resumption dispute. He then meets two martial arts disciples, Tiger and Dragon, who have been suffering coercion from Chung and his gang to sell their tea house, which used to be the training dojo of their *kung fu* master Law San. Having been in a coma for thirty years, Law suddenly wakes up and helps his disciples to resurrect his training school, although he suffers from amnesia. Without following the genre of a zero to hero formula, the film ends with Tiger, Dragon, and Leung losing the fight but undertaking to preserve the essence of the fighting spirit of martial arts.

In *Gallants*, a mythic city is allegorically conjured up in relation to the real city in crisis. What mediates this possibility is cinematic nostalgia. At first sight, the film does not seem to qualify as a nostalgia film because it lacks a double temporal structure and time-travel elements. It is, however, interesting to note that Leung's spatial journey from his workplace in the city to the village is comparable to typical time travel in nostalgia films such as *Rouge* and *He Ain't Heavy, He's My Father* (Peter Chan, 1994). Leung's workplace is characterized by keen competition and cruelty in human relationships, typical of the problems of a large city. Although the village is being encroached upon by commercial interests and entrepreneurialism, it is depicted as a mythic, allegorical space where time flows slowly and a sense of community is preserved. Without naming the village as a real location, the mythic and abstract qualities of such a space are enhanced. The mythic village with a slower rhythm of life reminds us of Michel Foucault's "heterotopia" where

different times and spaces collide. Unlike the distant past in *Merry-Go-Round* which serves as the repository for the characters' subjective memories, the village is a real location in the film but represented as an alternative, heterotopic space whose mental and psychological significance is more important than its physical locale. It conjures an imagined possibility of creating non-hegemonic conditions and resistance, however unrealistic that may be, within and against the urban domain of entrepreneurialism and developmentalism.

Their mythic qualities notwithstanding, the village and the dojo are not totally decontextualized. The use of cinematic nostalgia as a way of putting people and place together to deal with the present moment is quite remarkable. As a mixed genre with comic and action elements, *Gallants* makes use of nostalgic allusions rather than pastiche or parody as a style of imagining. While the film resembles a comic *kung fu* film, it does not mock parodically the earlier epoch to which it nostalgically refers. If pastiche, as Jameson famously argues, is the stylistic imitation of history without depth, the nostalgic allusions in *Gallants* recall an early New Wave film and its epoch. The Chinese name, *Da Lui Toi*, of *Flash Future Kung Fu* (directed by Kirk Wong Chi-keung in 1983) is borrowed directly as the title of *Gallants*. Using a range of techniques, from the retro-style of arranging credits from right to left to the inclusion of aging pop stars (Teddy Robin, Susan Shaw, Leung Siu-lung, and Chen Kuan-tai), the film creates at least two layers of history. Underneath the seemingly schizophrenic pastiche-style surface, there lie historical allusions which pay homage to an older generation and the film's cinematic predecessors.

Depicted as a threatened locality, the dojo, named "Gate of Law," in the mythic village houses an archive of fetishes, a variety of quotidian way of living as well as a host of resilient fighters. Despite their marginality and powerlessness, Master Law and his disciples' fighting spirit and resistance to the tycoon's coercive land resumption surprisingly created a widespread communal impact on Hong Kong viewers, especially young ones. While the context of real-estate development is only a point of departure in the film, the characters' resistance resonates with a collective consciousness that critiques and questions urban developmentalism, thus opening discursive spaces where debates between preservation and developmentalism are publicly negotiated. Although the film does not advocate any activist agenda, it was popularly received and appropriated by local critics who participated in cultural politics and community activism. Film critic Shum Longtin is a case in point. Being an active participant in various social movements against the government's demolition of urban structures, Shum (2011: 3) argues for an allegorical reading of *Gallants*, connecting the film's fighting spirit to the constitution of a "Hong Kong Subjectivity" vis-à-vis larger forces of mainlandization and urban developmentalism. Furthermore the social and cultural recognition of the fighting spirit in *Gallants* is celebrated by young viewers as forms of empowerment. Activists such as Tang Siu-wa, Chan King-fai, and Chow Si-chung have published reviews valorizing the cultural values of the film. As argued before, although the film was not made for reasons of activism, its topophilia and the characters' fighting spirit

are allegorically deciphered as expressions of crisis consciousness and sources of self-empowerment. It is the mythic and allegorical dimension of the film that has produced widespread social recognition.

Echoes of the Rainbow, in comparison, illustrates another interesting case about the relationship between film and reality. Financed by the Hong Kong Government's Film Development Fund, the film explores the livelihood of a lower-class neighborhood in 1960s British Hong Kong. With a lot of autobiographical inflections, Director Alex Law tells a tale of a working-class family whose elder son has contracted leukemia. Narrated from the point of view of the younger brother who has huge admiration for his elder, the film depicts a working-class couple who are hardworking, persevering, and resilient – the virtues which are archetypal of the generation of Chinese people of that era, as sociologist Lui Tai-lok (2007) might describe it. The people in the neighborhood nurture a community spirit in which they can share a sense of belonging. Through a quasi-realistic style, the film embraces, among other things, the vibrant lifestyle and values that the tenement residents demonstrated in the 1960s. In order to render the nostalgic ambience of this earlier time, the film was shot on location in Wing Lee Street in Sheung Wan. Both director Alex Law and producer Mabel Cheung said that Wing Lee Street has allowed them to re-create a sense of authenticity of grassroots life in the 1960s. While the street is the actual location, the shoe shop which is also the squatter residence of the Law family in the film is a constructed set on location. Under nostalgic limelight with a warm tone, the old neighborhood is reconstructed through a rosy, retrospective lens. Internationally, the film won the Crystal Bear for the Best Film in the Children's Jury "Generation Kplus" category at the 2010 Berlin Film Festival. Locally, despite some criticisms of the film's sentimentality and elitist outlook, it was generally popularly received and was considered as being reflective of the lifestyle of the lower-class people in the 1960s.

In fact, viewed with a critical eye, *Echoes of the Rainbow* tends to be quite sentimentalized and has reduced the significance of the socio-political dimension of the 1960s by focusing only on the personal experience of the elder brother and confining the scope to the bittersweet memories of the family. Some viewers are critical of this nostalgic aestheticization as the film did not display the conflictual history under British colonial rule. This is not to say that the film does not reflect the lifestyle of the era; perhaps does so rather "faithfully," without critical distance. The most interesting thing about the film, however, is not its rather straightforward and romanticized representation of the community ethos and harmonious human relationships in the neighborhood of an earlier era. It is interesting to note that while the film was not made with an activist agenda to promote historical preservation, after it had won the Crystal Bear in Berlin, Law and Cheung as well as his crew – Simon Yam and Sandra Ng – almost became spokespersons for preservation. Not long after, the Urban Renewal Authority decided to preserve all of the buildings in Wing Lee Street. Originally the URA's plan was to preserve only three out of the twelve tenements on the street.

Indeed *Echoes of the Rainbow* has made things happen, in a similar way to *Gallants* becoming appropriated by local critics to empower their community activism. This illustrates the fact that urban topography is shaped by the intertwined relationship between cultural representations and tactics. We can even say that Law's autobiographical film was inspired by earlier attempts to retrieve the "old" way of life through historical preservation. In the absence of a political agenda, the production of the film is a fortuitous happening to those who are eager to preserve their existing way of life in an old neighborhood, while it must be admitted there are some inhabitants who are disappointed by the loss of a chance to get compensation and to move to a government-subsided residential high-rise. After all, the old neighborhood is but a mythic representation without a unified sign but it can be appropriated by city dwellers for their own uses and purposes.

Toponymy and Everydayness in Mixed Realisms

It has been argued that cinematic nostalgia, which belongs to the mythic and allegorical dimension of the film image, mediates a city's crisis consciousness through topophilia. In comparative light, the contours of Hong Kong's topography relate intimately to its everydayness and toponymical considerations. Among the new topographical films, *The Way We Are*, *Big Blue Lake*, and *Crossing Hennessy* feature different districts of Hong Kong – Tin Shui Wai, Sai Kung, and Wan Chai – in various mixed modes of realism. Despite their different styles of imagining, they converge on the connection between topophilia and everydayness in a specific Hong Kong district. Toponymical naming in these films is both a mimetic device and a mythic trope. In addition to providing factual, geographical information often with the use of establishing shots, the naming of a district allows us to see a panorama of the district and the city of Hong Kong in miniature. Set in Tin Shui Wai, Ann Hui's *The Way We Are* adopts a quasi-realist mode to depict the daily life of ordinary people. The toponymical reference in the Chinese film title – *Tianshuiwei de ri yu ye* – inevitably reminds Hong Kong viewers of many tragic cases of domestic violence, which has become the subject matter of Hui's other film *Night and Fog* (2009), set in the same district, allegedly known as "the city of sadness." But *The Way We Are* accentuates topophilia through a portrayal of the quality of lived everyday life situated in a web of human relationships. Plagued by constant social and cultural problems, Tin Shui Wai is recast as a real and imagined location which is ordinary and habitable. With the use of mundane realism, Ann Hui creates a remarkable quotidian rhythm of the daily life of the ordinary characters. She allows us to see the food they eat, the activities they carry out and the humble spaces they traverse every day. Similarly, Jessey Tsang's *Big Blue Lake* depicts Sai Kung, an urbanized rural district, in transformations by combining fiction of love with documentary realism. In this mixed mode, the film includes interviews of local habitants in the village and documents shots of their daily life. Juxtaposed

with documentarism, the tale of love, be it romantic or familial, takes viewers on a trip through an allegorical space – toponymically referenced as the “big blue lake.” Intriguingly as frequent hikers of that district may tell us, there is no “big blue lake” in Sai Kung, but only a Big Blue Lake Road and a Big Blue Lake village near the protagonist’s residence, just as “utopia” means nowhere and a non-place. The film constantly intertwines the mythic and the nostalgic with the mundane, the everyday and the documentary with mythic “big blue lake” allegorizing a common yearning for the loss of nature.

Equally interesting and complex is the dualistic urban maze-like topography in Ivy Ho’s *Crossing Hennessy*, in which mimesis of everyday life and allegory of love coexist. Set in Wan Chai, one of the busiest and oldest regions of Hong Kong, the film is an urban romantic comedy which unfolds a web of relationships around Lee Tung Street in Wan Chai. It tells the story of an affective relationship between Loy and Oi Lin which begins as an unlikely romance. As a bachelor of 41, Loy becomes acquainted with Oi Lin whom he knows through match-making lunches arranged by his mother. They, however, are not attracted to each other at the outset. Oi Lin has a lover named Xu who is serving a sentence in prison, while Loy is still in touch with his ex-girlfriend Man Yu. Apparently Oi Lin and Xu have roots in mainland China as they both speak Putonghua (Mandarin). When Oi Lin and Loy’s friendship grows because of their shared interest in detective stories, Oi Lin becomes alienated from Xu. At the close of the film, they have developed their affection for each other while Loy’s widowed mother finally marries her long-time suitor who also serves as the accountant for their electrical appliances shop.

Inspired by Joan Micklin Silver’s *Crossing Delancey* (1988), the film’s title draws viewers’ attention to Hennessy Road and Wan Chai as a region, although much of the dramatic action does not take place on Hennessy Road. Johnston Road, where Loy’s shop is situated, is separated by Hennessy, from Lockhart Road, site of Oi Lin’s shop. *Crossing Hennessy*, as with *Crossing Delancey* in Silver’s Manhattan, is an act of love as well as a mundane, ordinary practice for inhabitants of Wan Chai when they need to purchase electrical appliances or bathroom facilities.

The film suggests that affectivity develops in the middle of a city in transformation, where demolition and urban renewal are a constant. Local film viewers’ topophilia is aroused when they witness the way in which the romantic drama unfolds in a mundane urban region where the old coexists with the new. It is also the site where the familiar is experienced alongside the unfamiliar. The film makes use of several techniques to depict a sense of the real, historical city. The film opens with a series of establishing shots of Wan Chai, similar to those often used in urban films to set the historical and cultural context. With these edited shots, from the aerial perspective to the ground-level view, a unique topographical landscape of Wan Chai as a place / region / district is conjured up. In this way topographical naming creates a sense of familiarity and historicity by showing notable road signs. The use of on-location realism in many other sites, for example,

the typical Hong Kong low-cost café, the wet market, the electronic appliances shop, contributes to the shaping of a topophilic ambience in the film.

In the middle of this familiar setting, the film makes an explicit reference to a moment of urban renewal by placing Loy in front of the big panels that enclose the demolished Lee Tung Street mentioned before. In this transitional moment, Loy limps his way out, experiencing his belated rite of passage at the age of 41! Just before this scene, he was beaten up by Oi Lin's boyfriend at the junction of Johnston Road and Lee Tung Street because of their love triangle. It is also a moment when he realizes that he has fallen in love with Oi Lin. It is a highly theatricalized scene and we hear Loy's voice-over say, "I have grown up, at the age of 41." At this moment of awakening, the demolished Lee Tung Street is theatricalized as an allegorical liminal site for the protagonist. Loy walks as a fully grown man and disappears into the dark, followed by a short span of a temporary blackout before the film transits into the next scene. Although there is no political activist agenda, the film evokes an emotive response to a city traumatized by neoliberal and real-estate-led urban development.

This highly theatricalized, mythic scene echoes with other surreal figurations which depict Hong Kong as a mutating space thriving on threat and crisis, if Wan Chai can be deciphered as a miniature of Hong Kong. The inclusion of Loy's ghostly father, and an uncanny, mysterious South Asian in the film, signify Hong Kong as an allegorical space between past and present, where Self and Other encounter. Despite their uncanny qualities, they are amusingly characterized with a comic twist. They both appear, reappear, and disappear in the most mundane Hong Kong spaces – the tram, the park, the HK-style cafe, and an ordinary electrical shop. The dead father is not haunting but rather functions to strengthen the social role of the good-for-nothing guy. Homological to the ghostly father is the South Asian, performed by Gill Mohindrapaul Singh, whose identity as a familiar stranger seeks to define the cultural space of Hong Kong not only as multiethnic and multicultural but also one that is too familiar to be fully understood. His mythic identities are homological to the mythic city which can only be deciphered by way of the scopic regime of the real and the surreal.

Concluding Remarks

The urban topography in these new films shows us that Hong Kong after 1997 is a disquieting cultural space situated within urban mutations. It illuminates the mythic quality of the nostalgic, the quotidian, and the everyday, bringing to bear the possibility of launching a politics of place through the invocation of the visible topography as real and surreal, historical and allegorical, factual and mythic, suggesting that one exists within, and as the effect of the other. Immersed in the threatened place plagued by political hegemony, neoliberalism,

and urban developmentalism, the “crisis city” in post-handover Hong Kong is constantly viewed through a topophilic cinematic lens. Be it cinematic nostalgia or quasi-realistic toponymy, the films collectively feature a new structure of feeling as a paradigmatic shift. Although they do not demonstrate any activist agenda of cultural politics, unexpectedly they have become “useful,” “inspiring,” and “empowering” cultural texts susceptible to social and political activists’ appropriations. The most salient features of these films lie in their capacity to grapple with the tensions inherent in the transformation of a place, rather than as political propaganda, but they resonate with the larger post-handover affective realm by recasting a familiar place as a nostalgic, unfamiliar, utopic, half-known, half-seen, mythic, and allegorical space opening up to new interpretations and reaching out to other spaces outside Hong Kong. These films may not be masterpieces in artistic terms but they assert their cultural significance by way of this double filmic imaginary. They remind us that localism is not narrowly confined to one locality only but has the potential to produce discursive spaces that generate public opinion. It is also through the depictions of various kinds of tensions that “place” and “space” become important notions defining each other. Both are historically and culturally defined but they also move beyond geopolitical confines to shape ways of imagining the obvious and the quotidian as the surreal and allegorical. This is perhaps the most important reason why we need to attribute significance to this corpus of topographical films, valorizing this cultural space of film which makes reflection, critique, and debates possible in a changing maze-like milieu of post-handover Hong Kong.

Notes

- 1 The work described in this chapter was fully supported by a grant from the Research Grants Council of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, China (Project No.: HKU743110H)
- 2 By “episteme,” I refer to “the historical *a priori* that grounds knowledge and its discourse and this represents the condition of their possibility within a particular epoch” – a definition that Michel Foucault theorizes in *The Order of Things* (1966/1994).
- 3 See also Leung Ping-kwan’s (2004) discussion of Lee Tit’s *Kaleidoscope* (1950) with a similar theme and Law Kar’s (1997) study of Cantonese melodrama from 1950 to 1969.
- 4 According to Hong Kong Motion Picture Industry Association’s (MPIA) definition of “Hong Kong films,” a Hong Kong film normally satisfies either one of the following two criteria. Firstly, all production companies of the film are Hong Kong companies. Secondly, at least one of the production companies of the film is a Hong Kong company and, at least 50% of the positions of producer, director, scriptwriter, leading actor or actress of the film are permanent Hong Kong residents (MPIA 2010). *Ip Man 2* is a co-production by Mandarin Films and a number of mainland companies, including Henan Movie Group, Beijing Shengshi Huaree Film Investment & Management, and

- Desen International Media. The film casts mainland actors and is set in Fo Shan. *Bruce Lee, My Brother* was co-produced by Media Asia Films, Shanghai TV Media, Beijing Antacus Film, Beijing Meng Ze Culture & Media, and J'Star Group. *Ip Man 2* and *Bruce Lee, My Brother* are regarded as co-productions not merely because of the mainland sources of investment but also their plots and targeted market.
- 5 The mainland companies that coproduced *Gallants* are Zhejiang Bona Film and TV Production Company for Beijing while *Echoes of the Rainbow* was coproduced by Dadi Century and Dadi Entertainment.
 - 6 Chan observes that there are mainly four types of nostalgia films in the 1980s and 90s: The first group reconstructs the social scene of the 1960s, the second group includes the 1930s Hong Kong and China. The third group intertextually recycles the film titles and events of Hong Kong cinema in the 1950s and 60s. The last group recreates ancient Chinese history in terms of costume genres. Chan argues that among these four types those films nostalgically referring to the 1950s and 1960s Hong Kong are the most important because it was the "golden age of colonial time" (Chan 2000: 257).
 - 7 The website of the Coffin Home reads as follows: "In 2005, the Tung Wah Coffin Home won the Award of Honour in the Heritage Preservation and Conservation Awards offered by the Antiquities & Monuments Office under the Government of Hong Kong as well as the Award of Merit in the 2005 Asia-Pacific Heritage Awards offered by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in recognition of the success of its large-scale restoration project." See <http://www.tungwah.org.hk/?content=533>.

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Hong Kong Cinema as Ethnic Borderland

Kwai-cheung Lo

Bodyguards and Assassins (Teddy Chan, 2009) is an interesting example of how post-1997 Hong Kong cinema attempts to engage itself in the political history of modern China. Unlike pre-1997 productions that also deal with anti-Manchu revolution in old Hong Kong, such as *Project A II* (Jackie Chan, 1987) in which the male protagonist (played by Jackie Chan), a local cop in the British-run police force, insisted on his political neutrality towards Qing loyalists and anti-Qing activists, this twenty-first century movie produced by Peter Chan is eager to take sides and show its dedication to the “politically correct” nationalist revolution. In a way, it can be considered a blunt effort made by an outsider trying to become and be accepted as an insider in contemporary China. While the tone of *Bodyguards and Assassins* is deadly serious and tragic, with numerous characters dying for the revolutionary cause, the film can be considered a “playful,” if not naïve, re-creation of China’s revolutionary history: a group of volunteers from all parts of China is struggling to protect Sun Yat-sen, the founding father of modern Chinese nation state, in British-rule Hong Kong of 1906 against a troop of assassins sent by the Qing imperial court.

Reviews focus on how silly and desperate the film is by inventing an imaginative assassination plot and rescue mission on Sun Yat-sen in order to find a self-righteous historic-political role for Hong Kong to play in the Chinese revolution. But what has been generally neglected is the story’s ambitious endeavor to cope with China’s ethnic politics (*zuqun zhengzhi* 族群政治) by creating an alliance between the North and the South. The voluntary group which lost most of its members sacrificing their lives for the safety of Sun, and hence the cause of revolution, came from all walks of life, and were all Han Chinese from diverse geographical regions,

including Hong Kong, Guangdong, Jiangsu, Henan, Tianjin, as well as Shanxi. The film picks Sun to open up a space for Hong Kong to participate in China's politics not merely because Sun is a historical figure well accepted and recognized by both Taiwan and the mainland, but probably also because he was a Cantonese, and so someone with whom Cantonese majority of Hong Kong citizens can identify.¹ Hong Kong filmmakers may have difficulty in grasping the histories and complexities of political struggles (in the sense of court politics, palace intrigues, mass politics, and ideological posturing) in the Chinese mainland, but they are very conscious of ethnic and regional differences from which potential conflicts may emerge in Chinese communities.

Zone of Transition

This is probably not the occasion to delineate the difference between the terms "nation" (*minzu* 民族) and "ethnic" since they have always been used with striking inconsistency. But if "nation" is understood as a socio-political category tightly connected with the sacred boundaries of a sovereign state and if the Hong Kong cinema I am going to discuss is not exactly included as part and parcel of a "national" cinema, the notion of "ethnic," which is usually supposed to be a cultural term, can then be used to examine some groups that "are *not* normally linked in theory to state boundaries" (Wallerstein 1991: 77; original emphasis). Hong Kong, as an ex-colonial space, is historically sensitive to the implications of boundaries and the way in which a nation state relies upon territorial construction of a border to separate "us" from "them" in order to constitute its citizenship as a collective identity. But unlike a modern nation state that divinizes, sacralizes, and hence absolutizes its borders, (colonial) Hong Kong not only deprives border of its designated meaning, but also relativizes its function and detaches it from the idea of sovereignty by making border a midway zone and an object of constant transgression. Throughout history, Hong Kong, whether as an outpost of British imperialist force or as China's channel to the world, serves more as a place of mediation and of border-crossing than a place of absolute sovereignty and border enforcement. After World War II, if Communist China wanted to take Hong Kong back, the borderland was basically indefensible from British point of view. The flagging British Empire, in the process of dismantling itself, thought of abandoning the colony not only because of its indefensibility but also of the huge potential burden of an influx of Chinese refugees. It was the US that succeeded in persuading Britain to retain the colony for its strategic function in the Cold War, and the British also found that Hong Kong might help them regain postwar influence in the new global order. While the US was using Hong Kong on China's coast as a suitable ground for intelligence gathering, anti-communist propaganda works, and a recreation site for its naval fleets, the British government had to accommodate

China's reactions and feelings, though the Chinese communist regime tolerated Hong Kong's colonial status since it derived considerable benefits from the colony and used it as an avenue to the outside world under Western containment. It was this edgy or on-the-brink position that characterized the postwar Hong Kong's delicate status.

Frontier borderlands were once the (imaginary) arena for China's national salvation, redemption, and revival in the 1930s and 1940s when the new republic was threatened by rapacious foreign invasions. In the eyes of Chinese people during the time of national crisis, it was at the periphery where the true spirit of China would be resurrected. The northwest frontier was then transformed from a marginal position in Chinese national discourse to a central place, as if it were the nation's heartland. Hong Kong borderland might not capture nation's attention on such a scale, but it is still seized upon in the imaginations of the Chinese nation even though it has already been claimed back as an integral part of the reconstitution of the Chinese state. It is an "interior" which includes elements of otherness or foreignness that lead to perception of it as "exterior" occasionally. The institutional design of "one country, two systems" offered by Beijing for the return of Hong Kong already reveals how the ex-colony is placed in the category of other peripheral ethnic "autonomous" regions like Tibet, Xinjiang, or Inner Mongolia. Back in the Qing era, the central government, instead of asserting a nationalist ideology at the empire's fringes, had a special institutional structure – a mechanism of autonomous and indirect rule to govern non-Han ethnic areas in exchange for their adherence to build a multinational polity. While the "one country, two systems" model, like "autonomous rule" in China's other peripheral regions, has not given Hong Kong any really great degree of autonomy, because of Beijing's increasing intervention into the city's internal affairs and its unwillingness to implement democratic reforms, mainland Chinese nowadays see the port city as a far-flung fantasy-land where they can buy consumer goods, gain an internationally-recognized passport and give birth in order to gain citizenship for their babies. Ironically, the present active and convenient cross-border flows make integration of Hong Kong with China even harder to bring about. In the old days, for instance the beginning of the 1950s, a Cantonese movie such as *The Kid* (Fung Fung, 1950) could tell how people easily went back to the mainland when they found it hard to make a living in Hong Kong. There was hardly any border patrol between the two places, and people had no identity issue at all. Both border and identity were fluid at that time. But in later decades, when the Hong Kong border was no longer opened to so many mainland Chinese and when China's economy did not take off, Hong Kong was either condemned, with jealous undertones, as a "cultural desert" or fantasized as an outskirts place safeguarding traditional Chinese culture damaged by political turmoil on the mainland. Years after the handover, when the economic statuses of the mainland and Hong Kong have been gradually reversed in terms of a hierarchic position in the capitalist world order, and when it is mainland visitors who condescend to Hong Kong people,

ethnic political contention as between center and periphery seems to come into play again. Precisely because the ambiguous Hong Kong borderland has not been entirely integrated into the state, it remains an alluring space to capture the gaze of a rapidly changing China.

Although Hong Kong's cultural productions, including its cinema, may help to create and maintain a firm foothold in people's psyche for the institutionalization of certain differentiating borders, the frontier in Hong Kong films is actually more a zone of transition between in-groups and out-groups than a stringent barrier separating the included from the excluded. After all, the film industry in Hong Kong, an epitome of the city's delicate situation, is defined by its outward-looking nature and export orientation, since the local market can never sustain its survival and growth. Though there may be a certain sense of racial-cultural superiority underlying some of their productions, Hong Kong films always aim to push the boundaries outward in order to progressively expand and integrate with the others for the sake of economic interests. Indeed, all boundaries, whether they are territorial, political, linguistic, ethnic, or sheer cultural-conceptual, can be negotiated in Hong Kong cinema while performing the function of division. Favoring the hybrid and ambiguous over the glare of absolute sovereignty, it is more hankering for a truth that is provisional and corrigible, and alert to a variety of differences. Its ethnic borderland is a place where national, local, indigenous, and foreign cultures are mixed together, and multiple identities are traditionally constructed in contingent, hybrid, and fluid modes, though it may not go as far as to have no particular nationality nor to be an exterior border to the Eurocentric modern world-system.

Unlike the paradigms of Chinese-language cinema (*huayu dianying*) and Sino-phone cinema that place major emphasis upon deconstructing the hegemonic ideology of sinocentric nation state and embracing hybrid-language, multidialectal, transnational, and diasporic productions set in a rather loose time frame (Lu and Yeh 2005; Shih 2007; Yue and Khoo 2014), the notion of ethnic borderland in relation to Hong Kong and its cinema aims at retrieving historicity; it primarily concerns the spatiality which is implicit in territorial practice of politics and geographical construction of identities and relations. But it is not easy to write a coherent history of the borderland that is not in constant dialogue with the core. The ambivalent meaning of "border" reveals how it both encloses and connects, being an obstacle and a site of passage, constituting a limit for further progress as well as a departing point for foreign exploration. In face of the asymmetrical interactions between core and periphery, the unremitting border experiences of Hong Kong and its filmic productions highlight the changing expressions of the state sovereignty and construct the city at the nation's margin as an integral part of the global world. The borderland notion may configure a space alternative to the dominant model of the nation state by generalizing multiple citizenship status, including different languages in the linguistic map, and positing Hong Kong and its cinema inside and outside, within and beyond the border.

North–South Division

In contrast to what *Bodyguards and Assassins* projected onto modern Chinese political struggle, the revolution led by Sun and the United League (*Tongmenghui* 同盟會, which was previously known as the Revive China Society, *Xingzhonghui* 興中會) was largely considered an uprising from the South not only because of the active participants' place of origin but also because of the traditional sino-centric mechanism under which the South or the coastal area was considered a politically marginal space. Any driving force for major socio-political changes from there cannot be taken too seriously in such a traditional perspective and hierarchical system. Thus, it is no surprise that a Northern general, Zhang Zuolin 張作霖, who was in control of Manchuria, made a despicable comment on the 1911 Revolution to a Japanese ambassador: "I prefer to concede Manchuria to foreigners than to the Southerners... As a Northerner, I would prefer death to making humiliating subordination to the republic of the Southerners" (Zou 1980: 72, 74). The great North–South divide² that designates the fictiveness of Han Chinese homogeneity myth and almost tears the Revolution of 1911 apart seems to be overcome imaginatively by the Hong Kong film. While the movie is probably a deliberate effort by the Hong Kong film industry to ingratiate itself with the Chinese authorities, the possibility of eliminating ethnic-regional rift perhaps can only be realized either in some phantasmal form or in an undetermined future.

Looking back at the history of Hong Kong cinema, we find that the entertainment industry has a tradition of dramatizing but also alleviating North–South ethnic and cultural conflict in popular genre of comedy. In the early sixties, the MP&GI Company (Motion Picture and General Investment Company, generally known as Dian Mou 電懣 but later renamed as Cathay) produced a series of farcical comedies about tensions and reconciliations between Chinese Northerners and Southerners in colonial Hong Kong. Voted as one of the ten most popular Cantonese and Mandarin films of 1961, its popularity helped generate two more sequels in next few years, *The Greatest Civil War on Earth* (Wong Tin-lam, 1961) was probably the first Hong Kong feature with equal amounts of Cantonese and Mandarin dialogues in one film.³ Since then, "*Nan–Bei*" (North–South) persistently becomes a popular and recurring theme and crops up in the titles of numerous Hong Kong movies released afterwards. The film exemplified the inflow of northern Chinese to Cantonese-dominated Hong Kong from the 1950s and depicted in a comic way the ways in which the two major ethnic groups came to reconcile their differences. On the other hand, the film can also be seen as an allegory of the dichotomy and rivalry between Mandarin cinema and Cantonese cinema in post-war Hong Kong. Given the conventional notion of the South in Chinese history, referring to regions south of the Yangtze River, that *The Greatest Civil War on Earth* portrays a Shanghainese character and his offspring as representatives of Northerner is historically inaccurate. Perhaps what the film targets is less the

traditional North–South split than immediate competitions and economic threats brought by capitalists and filmmakers from Shanghai to colonial Hong Kong of that period.⁴ The North–South divide is a substitute for discriminatory class difference between Mandarin cinema and Cantonese cinema. In such view, the former, mostly made by emigrants from Shanghai, is considered modernized, arty, high-budgeted, and prestigious, whereas the dialect-oriented latter is local, cheap, backward, and provincial-looking. Cantonese filmmakers complained about how their works were prejudiced and not allowed to enter some Asian film contests in which Mandarin films won awards (Wong 2003).⁵ As I. C. Jarvie writes, Mandarin cinema “stem(s) from the emerging modern national consciousness; tend(s) to be produced in sophisticated urban surroundings ... by culturally cosmopolitan Chinese; and to treat stories and use the movie medium in a way that comes to some kind of terms with progress and the modern world” (Jarvie 1977: 87). It is Mandarin cinema that has been regarded as the most advanced symbol of modernity.

The ethnic borderland character of Hong Kong cinema, however, does not really embody and uphold the North–South division. It only appropriates the North–South dichotomy as a means to deal with the modernity issue: how the modern dimensions of Shanghai life brought by upper-middle class emigrants to Hong Kong can be absorbed by the Cantonese-dominated city while national and Sinocentric consciousness can be sieved and screened out in the colonial setting. The film series aspire towards a new kind of community that is based not so much on geographical and biological determinants of blood and ethnicity as on the liberty to move beyond and cross boundaries. Though the Northern and Southern patriarchs fight over almost everything and are unable to find any real resolution, the second generations initiate mixing, merging, and even marrying in order to construct a new hybrid society with a different epistemological horizon. While teasing North–South differences but promoting equal status of Northerners and Southerners with a balance of Mandarin and Cantonese cast and dialogues, *The Greatest Civil War on Earth* was however produced by the Mandarin production crew of MP&GI. Cinema was an integral and essential piece of the modernization process in colonial Hong Kong. Even though the “North–South” films were not exactly a genuine self-reflection of Cantonese cinema, they represented a moment of symbolism – showing how the Cantonese film industry (as well as the Cantonese-dominated society at large) could learn and assimilate its Mandarin counterpart that had attained the knowledge of and access to modernity. This model of the backward learning from the more advanced (though Mandarin cinema that imitates the Western exemplar is by no means the most advanced) undoubtedly repeats and reinforces the world-system structure that obliges the periphery to imitate the core in order to tread its modernization path. Under the colonial order of British governance, such local craving for (Western) modernity via visual media was endorsed and promoted – through subtle censorship mechanisms – in order to justify British legitimacy.

Perhaps the “North–South” film series can be understood in this light: a fantasy staged by the emigrating, culturally hegemonic Northern minority to imagine

how the Cantonese in the British-ruled colony ultimately embrace the values and vision brought by Northerners, though not without some disgruntled reactions. But the fantasy of the Northern Other also becomes the very desire of local Cantonese at a time that allowed transborder movements of capital, people, and ideas. In other words, the local history of the Hong Kong borderland is in a position to implement the global design of the Euro-American development and modernization through the agency of cosmopolitan and westernized Shanghainese. The modernization process of Hong Kong colony in the 1950s was already revealing the pattern of what we today call the divide of Global North and Global South. However, the modernity of Hong Kong cinema conveys double consciousness that moves beyond the categories, such as nation-state, created and imposed by hegemonic Western conceptualization. It is a cinema that attempts to catch up with modernity pulses but also to move along and beyond the unsurpassable and sacred borders of sovereign nation state which is part of Eurocentric modernity.

Ethnic / Dialect Films

Meanwhile, after the Chinese revolutionaries established their government and attained central power, North-centrism (or Central Plains syndrome) became dominant in state cultural policy. In 1936–37, the Central Film Review Commission of the Guomindang (or Kuomintang – KMT) banned any filmmaking in Cantonese dialect in China and did not allow imports of Cantonese films from Hong Kong, all in the name of standardizing the Chinese national language (Fu 2003: 58–9). Although the policy did not last long, probably because the central government under the KMT was relatively weak in asserting its power and the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese war obliged the government to reprioritize its agenda (Teo 1997: 6), it demonstrated that the modern nation state strongly identifies its political border with a linguistic border by imposing a single dominant language within its territorial boundaries. Under the emergence of nationalism in twentieth-century China, linguistic difference constitutes one of the most distinguishable marks of collective identity. It is no surprise that a new regime like the KMT had to enforce the coincidence of language and territories as a political and juridical norm.⁶

Hong Kong cinema at China's territorial edge is fundamentally Cantonese-dialect oriented, though at some historical moments it declined, and even virtually ceased, to produce any Cantonese film.⁷ The prevailing status of Cantonese dialect in Hong Kong cinematic productions does not necessarily mean that the port city intends to defy and challenge the linguistic universality promoted by the Chinese nation state; the flourishing of Cantonese in Hong Kong has a lot to do with the legacy of the tolerance characterizing British colonial policy. The film industry is flexible enough to implement its dubbing strategy for different linguistic markets, although Hong Kong film's borderland characteristics do not always resonate in a harmonious manner with state-sponsored nationalist ideology. Instead, it is

economic interest or commercial inclination (to be more precise, cross-border economy) that leads the way, promoting and perpetuating greater autonomy for entrepreneurs, stronger reluctance to exercise central state control, more mobility of people and commodities, increased plurality of ethnic and cultural identification, and multiple cross-cutting networks of interaction. Hong Kong as China's maritime frontier is never simply a metaphor. Its coastal peripheral position ties it to external forces travelling by sea, including the regions of Southeast Asia, the so-called "*Nanyang* 南洋" (South Seas). Not only is Nanyang a major overseas market for Hong Kong films, it was also a significant source of capital and energy that contributes to its magnificent development and growth: many filmmakers, producers, and financiers were Nanyang Chinese elites. The most prominent examples from the 1950s onward, of course, are Run Run Shaw (Shao Yifu 邵逸夫) of the Shaw Brothers Studio and Loke Wan Tho (Lu Yuntao 陸運濤) of the Cathay Organization.

Because of this overseas connection, Hong Kong cinema constitutes a platform where the representations of diasporic and nomadic subjects are able to compete with those of the rooted and locally embedded subjects. Other than almost ceaselessly making Cantonese movies, the industry produced hundreds of other "ethnic films" (*zuqun dianying* 族群電影) or "dialect films" (*fangyan dianying* 方言電影) to target different ethnic groups in diaspora. In the late 1950s and early 1960s while Mandarin and Cantonese productions were at their peaks in Hong Kong film production, hundreds of Amoy-dialect films (*xiayupian* 廈語片) and Chaozhou (*Teochow*)-dialect ones (*chaoyupian* 潮語片) (Yu 2000: 19; 2001: 40),⁸ were made in the immigrant-dominated city of that era with financial support from diasporic Chinese communities in Nanyang. Although these movies were mainly released and widely circulated in Southeast Asia for overseas Fujianese and Chaozhouese populations (Chaozhou-dialect films mainly went after the Chinese communities in Thailand and Singapore, whereas Amoy-dialect movies covered a larger area including Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Taiwan), and Hong Kong local audiences rarely had the chance to see them in a theater, these Amoy- or Chaozhou-dialect films were primarily shot in Hong Kong and their casts and crews were mostly based there. There is, as yet, no clearly designated place or specific cultural position for these dialect movies in the studies of Hong Kong film history (Taylor 2011; Ng 2012; Ng 2014).⁹ But the productions of these dialect films for diasporic Chinese ethnic groups reveals how the borderland characteristics of Hong Kong cinema pluralize the practice of cultural politics and subvert the (linguistic) monopoly of Chinese representation.

In terms of the Amoy-dialect films' contribution to the development of Hong Kong cinema, the nearly forgotten sector of the film industry was a training ground for a number of directors who succeeded in their filmmaking careers for Mandarin and Cantonese cinemas decades later (outstanding examples are Wong Tin-lam 王天林, Zhou Shilu 周詩祿, Zhao Shushen 趙樹桑). There were also famous Mandarin directors like Ma Xu Weibang 馬徐維邦 who ended up making

Amoy-dialect productions. Ivy Ling Po 凌波, the queen of *Huangmei Diao* 黃梅調 opera films in the 1960s, starred in more than seventy Amoy-dialect films at the time when she was known as Seow Kuan 小娟.

These Amoy-dialect or Chaozhou-dialect films produced in Hong Kong do not just point to heterogeneous issues of cultural or linguistic differences in modern Chinese context. Lingering with a sense of belonging to Southeast Asian Chinese, Thai Chinese, or *Peranakan* (mixed-race descendants of Chinese immigrants and Indonesian / Malay), or *Tsinoy* (Chinese-Filipino) communities, these ethnic productions also provide rich resources for the understanding of and reflection on what a modern Chinese identity might mean in its complex ambiguity. These ambiguous identities produced by the borderland may not be easily incorporated and subsumed by the nationalism embodied in a party or a state. While, in the early stage of their existence, many of these dialect films were costume dramas some of them were also modeled on successful Mandarin films in contemporary cosmopolitan settings, generating less a nostalgic feeling toward a bygone imperial China than an intimate link between the film's diegetic world and the current conditions of modern life in the Asian host countries. Perhaps, unlike state nationalism that expresses hegemony and consolidates domination, diasporic Chinese conceive of the dialect films as a metaphor of national or cultural identification (rather than a given identity) that simultaneously calls for fictive cohesiveness and fights against oppressive uniformity. These Amoy-dialect movies also inspired the Taiwanese to produce their own Hokkien-dialect (or Minnanese) films (*taiyupian* 台語片), breeding the pride of expressing oneself in one's own idiom and also the potential separatist idea against not only the Mandarin-speaking KMT government in Taiwan but also mainland China.¹⁰ It is said that Amoy dialect from Fujian province is slightly different from Hokkien in Taiwan, and also that, because the Amoy-dialect films were regarded as Hong Kong imports, they could never really represent the voice of Taiwan. However, the relationship between Hong Kong-based Amoy-dialect films and Taiwan's own Hokkien productions was much intertwined than what some critical discourses later tried to demarcate and differentiate them. Actually, the development of Hong Kong Mandarin cinema was closely tied with that of Taiwan cinema under the economic incentives offered by the KMT for decades, leading to the development that the identity of Hong Kong Mandarin films were mixed and conflated with that of Taiwan Mandarin movies. The Hong Kong-produced Amoy-dialect films also benefited from the policy of the Nationalist government in Taipei.

Cold War Politics

In Cold War Asia, these Chinese dialect movies were used as a weapon to contain Communist China. The KMT government allowed and supported these dialect films to be released in Taiwan as a useful apparatus for its political agenda to

spread anti-communist messages and preserve strongholds against infiltration of socialist ideas into Chinese communities in Southeast Asia, given the fact that the dialect film people fled China to escape communism and their film plot was mainly confined to some seemingly apolitical or classical folk tales. Many Hong Kong films in the Cold War era did take advantage of the divided world of communist and capitalist blocs by taking the Nationalist, “free world” side in order to enjoy favorable economic treatment and market access. From the perspective of the Nationalist state, the establishment of the Hong Kong and Kowloon Cinema and Theatrical Enterprise Free General Association (usually known as *ziyou zonghui* 自由總會) by Hong Kong right-wing pro-KMT filmmakers in 1956 might help the government in Taiwan to exert better control over the film industry in the British-ruled city. On the other hand, the Chinese communists also wielded ideological influences on diasporic communities through the movies made by their attached studios under the direction of the Hong Kong Macau Work Committee (*gangao gongwei* 港澳工委) in colonial Hong Kong and Macau. But what the CCP and the KMT authorities wanted to believe was not necessarily what Hong Kong filmmakers actually thought and did. Filmmakers accepted their dependent position not from sheer ideological commitment but mainly for economic goals and personal reasons. It strains credulity to consider Hong Kong cinema as carrying any principled political conviction. Its borderland attributes implied the acceptance of objective realities that so-called democracy as well as socialism were nothing but utopias. The film industry accepted the necessarily compromised character of all action that arises from its dependence upon some morally suspicious or even dangerous ends. But it also revealed that people in this borderland were not captured by ideas and political categories created by states. As if practicing the tributary system in imperial times, an intermediary area like Hong Kong had no choice but to pay tribute in both directions and accept its dependent position in return for other supports. Following the practice of playing the role of middleman during the expansion of European powers in Asia since the nineteenth century, Hong Kong film industry under (overseas) Chinese entrepreneurs continued to function as compradors not just between Western colonizers and native consumers (or between Hollywood and the ongoing project of commercialization of mainland productions at present) but also between Chinese leftist and right wing groups in the 1950s.

However, as well as competing, pro-Communist and pro-Nationalist film companies sometimes collaborated in order to expand their market share and seek box-office returns. Co-operation could help conflicting ideological camps to gain mutual benefits in economic terms. For example, left-wing studios including Great Wall, Feng Huang, and Union would sell their productions to pro-Taiwan Shaw Brothers and Cathay who exhibited those films in their Southeast Asian theaters so as to fill out the demanding show times. It was also not uncommon for filmmakers or stars belonging to one ideological camp to switch side to make movies for the opposing camp (Lee 2009). Ideological ambivalence prevailed in

those nationalism- or nostalgia-themed works toward which both left and right had no strong objection. The economic orientation of the film industry also urged all political sides to produce works that would not take too much risk of political censorship in the markets. In British colonial borderland of Hong Kong, political ideology was "contaminated," if not dominated, by economic interest. Any ideological camp that endeavored to go extreme, as with the riots of 1967 provoked by the left, would be curbed and oppressed by the British colonial force that tried hard to construct its neutral role in Chinese political struggle and to build its benevolent image of helping Hong Kong to modernize and prosper. Political stability of the colony was the condition that British colonizers desperately needed to legitimize its rule in the postwar period of national self-determination and global decolonization movements. However, the success of Hong Kong colonial modernity especially in the 1980s cannot be unreservedly credited to British benevolent rule.

The Cold War also brought in racial Others to Hong Kong silver screens and its production teams. Given the historical fact that the colony was racially segregated under British administration, other races tended to be more imagined through media than interacted with and experienced in the daily life of the Chinese populace. From the 1950s onwards, when the market in mainland China was gradually closed to their productions, many Hong Kong film companies (such as Shaw Brothers, Cathay, and Kong Ngee) initiated cooperative schemes with their counterparts in other Asian countries, including Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, and Thailand, in order to search for new markets and to build distribution networks. Through these collaborations, they gained superior technology from more developed Asian countries like Japan and, by means of exotic settings and foreign casts, made their productions more appealing to their audiences. The Cold War Hong Kong co-productions with other Asian states were primarily organized along the line of the political-ideological camp of the US's allies and clients. However, the Hong Kong film industry did not simply play a passive role in Cold War politics. To an extent, Hong Kong cinema, through actively working with other places, constituted a political site away from those ideological arenas unequivocally organized by the states.

Japan was the first Asian nation that promulgated its imperialist idea of Asia through its film production. Though defeated in World War II, Japan continued, in association with US Cold War strategies, its Asianist film ambitions, organizing Asian film festivals and working with other Asian film industries in order to advance its influence and improve its negative war image. Meanwhile, the Hong Kong film industry, under the myths of British laissez-faire policy and apolitical stance, also aggressively sought to take a leading share in the Asian film market. For this reason, the collaboration and interaction between Hong Kong film industry and its Japanese counterpart was a productive and thriving one.

Transnationalization and Localization

In mid-1950s, Shaw Brothers collaborated with Japan's Daiei Company to produce the costume drama *The Princess Yang* (Kenji Mizoguchi, 1955) with an entirely Japanese cast playing Chinese historical figures of the Tang dynasty, while Shaw sent Tao Qin to co-write the script and contributed 30 percent of the production costs. In the following year Shaw Brothers worked with another Japanese company, Toho, to produce *Madame White Snake* (Shiro Toyoda, 1956) also with an entirely Japanese cast playing Chinese characters. The practice of Japanese performing other Asians began in Japan's wartime cinema in order to construct an idealized pan-Asian subject for promoting the Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere. These postwar co-operations were actually initiated by the Japanese side. From the perspective of Japanese film history,

[i]n both films the directors – Mizoguchi in the former, Toyoda in the latter – were largely wasted, though each was given his first chance to work in color. The box-office returns were not impressive, but at least Daiei and Toho each received the dubious prestige of having made yet another foreign co-production (Anderson and Richie 1959: 248–249).

But for the Shaw Brothers, their collaboration with Japan had just begun. From 1966 to 1972, a total of six Japanese directors, including Umetsugu Inoue, were hired by Shaw Brothers to produce thirty-one Mandarin features. Recruitment of these Japanese directors not only elevated the standards of Hong Kong cinema but also brought in some exterior elements that constitute the very conditions of borderland cultural productions that the concept of national cinema cannot fully encompass.

"Transnational," a concept from the 1990s that is still structured around the notion of nation state, may not be the most appropriate term to describe Hong Kong cinema in the 1950s and 60s, especially if we endeavor to use film productions of the colony as a means of subversion of the hegemony of nation centrality. But as discussed earlier, while Hong Kong cinema does not necessarily conform to the ideological construct of nation state, it rarely challenges it in any intentional manner. Cross-border movements of the Hong Kong film industry starting from the 1950s were actually triggered off by the nation states that were engaged in antagonistic relations and even conflicts. The Cold War factor prolonged Hong Kong's colonial status that paradoxically contributed to its mobility and flexibility from the constricting logics of the state. Hong Kong cinema exceeded the bounds of the nation state and opened up to transnational capital beyond the confines of political borders (although some transnational capital was injected very much within rigid political lines, such as the American-funded Asia Film Company in the early 1950s). The transnational development of Hong Kong cinema may liberate it from the tutelage of state governance

and the oppressiveness of nationalist ideology. But its achievement of expansiveness and fluidity also designates a smooth articulation into global capitalist mechanism within which Euro-American overarching systems are still prevailing.

The industry's desire to get into the mainstream Western market (not just Chinese diasporic markets in the West) was initially manifested through its first entirely English-dialogue film *Mandarin Bowl* (*Tu Guangqi*) in 1956. Given the facts that Chinese American actress Anna May Wong was able to achieve international stardom, and Pearl S. Buck's novels about China and Chinese characters were made into major Hollywood films, including *The Good Earth* (Sidney Franklin, 1937) and *Dragon Seed* (Harold S. Bucquet and Jack Conway, 1944) which were well received by Western audiences, veteran director Tu Guangqi's English debut cannot be considered as something out of the box. While Hollywood had its Caucasian cast to play slanted-eye Chinese characters, Tu was able to find Chinese performers who spoke fluent English. The production company Hualong told the press that they made this English-language film to promote the virtues of Chinese culture through the global lingua franca. The story is about

a Canadian Chinese Zheng Ailin who came to Hong Kong to collect data about a pirate a hundred years ago for her masters dissertation. Being helped by Professor Paul, a refugee from the mainland, and enlightened by a Taoist, Zheng was able to find an ancient copper bowl over which hints were inscribed to reveal the whereabouts of a treasure trove. A group of bandits also discovered the secret of the treasure and chased after Zheng and Paul to the off-shore island Cheung Chau. The police finally arrested the bandits. Following the instructions of the Taoist, Zheng and Paul made good use of the treasure and participated in the refugee relief works (Kwok 2003: 169).

Although a copy of *Mandarin Bowl* cannot be retrieved nowadays and there were hardly any reviews of the film, we can understand that this crime movie by prolific director Tu who made hundreds of commercial flicks after the "orphan island" period (1937–1941) in Shanghai is possibly more than just a sheer commercial attempt to break into Western market. What underlies it is a century-long desire to catch up with the West and an effort to present an image of how one wants oneself to be seen in a world shaped by Western influences. Repeating the Chinese path of modernization (or Westernization) in the early twentieth century, *Mandarin Bowl* soon discovered that English-language production was actually an exclusive club dominated by Caucasians, and linguistic anglicization alone could not win recognition or gain any support in both domestic and international markets. *Mandarin Bowl* was the first and the last production of the Hualong company. But a Chinese movie filmed fully in English could appear only in borderland Hong Kong especially when the mainland and Taiwan under special political circumstances were becoming fervently nationalistic and more subject

to racial prejudice, and when China was reduced to one state or even to one political party.

It took another twenty years for the Hong Kong film industry to fulfill its desire of opening up mainstream markets in America and Europe. In early 1970s, Bruce Lee's *Enter the Dragon* (Robert Clouse, 1973) and a few other Hong Kong-made martial arts films were able to enter the US blockbuster list and set off the *kung fu* craze in the West. But this time the Chinese characters did not need to speak their lines in English (their dialogues were dubbed). It was their body language, not the verbal one, which appealed to Western audiences. And, perhaps, such language is even more universal than the strictly English one. The larger exodus of Hong Kong filmmakers and stars to Hollywood, leading to the production of dozens of English-language films in the 1990s, may blur the borders between nations and cultures and even exacerbate the difficulties of classifying individuals or groups within simple denominations of national identities, a phenomenon which resonates with the cultural characteristics of the borderland. From today's perspective, these Western adventures (or Westward expansive forces) of Hong Kong cinema might become frontier dynamic vehicles (or a model with global reach) for Chinese national cinema, which is rapidly absorbing the Hong Kong film industry into its system as part of the statist economic integration project of the border zones, intending to rebuild its global enterprise networks in the twenty-first century.

Although Hong Kong filmmakers are actively participating in mainland China's efforts to create popular nationalist narratives through the production of high-budget costume dramas as a means of mobilizing a unified community, Hong Kong's marginality in the nationalist community in terms of its geographical frontier and position on the socio-political periphery will continue to be a significant factor for its intractability and mobility beyond China's controlled state boundaries. Even though state censorship has driven some Hong Kong filmmakers who do not want to entirely comply with the strict policy to re-focus on the local market with the emphasis on crime, horror and soft porn genres which cannot be released in mainland China, co-productions do not necessarily mean a process of thorough mainlandization (state control, to be more precise). Films like *The Silent War* (Alan Mak and Felix Chong, 2012), *Drug War* (Johnnie To, 2012), *The Grandmaster* (Wong Kar-wai, 2013), and *American Dreams in China* (Peter Chan, 2013) featuring mainland Chinese settings, mainland Chinese themes and even entire mainland Chinese cast no longer center on the idea of resistance but on that of deliberate adaptation or feats of plastic identity shape-shifting, and may use duplicitous discourses to get around censorship. Because of the changes in circumstance, those who have disengaged themselves from the state may seek to affiliate themselves the same state. Having few permanent allegiances, the film industry is liable to shift its linguistic practice and ethnic identity. Indeed, resistance to, or dodging, mainlandization is not presumably equivalent to localization.

Hong Kong's localization process, which was not confined to cinema, began in the late 1960s and early 1970s. But it was probably a practice to keep fundamental issues like colonialism and borderland nature of the place out of public debate and out of Hong Kong people's mind. Localization, which was by no means equivalent to decolonization, gradually made Hong Kong people develop the illusory thought that they had become the master of their land. Such "misrecognition," however, is never accompanied with any (political) confidence in being on one's own or being one's own judge in understanding or governing of one's own society. Deep inside the colonial mentality of Hong Kong subject, there is an uncertain feeling of its so-called master position. Even though Hong Kong films dominated Asian markets in the 1980s and early 1990s and was charged as being "imperialist," the Hong Kong media invasion was considered as a "marginal imperialism" (Lii 1998: 125) which was different from the core one practiced by the West. Instead of incorporating or swallowing up others as many empires did, Hong Kong cinema only yielded to or blended into others, precisely because of its historical and structural marginality. Such cultural practice could be seen as a strategy to avoid incorporation in state structures. Although margins usually denote the subjugated, the silenced, and the excluded, the marginal borderland can also be understood as bustling and noisy zone of interactions and crossings, where hybrid cultures emerge to subvert the imaginaries of the dominant and allow new identities and alternatives to come into being. To understand Hong Kong and its cinema as ethnic borderland is not to shift attention from China's other ethnic margins which are usually identified as rural, upland, or hinterland places where backwardness, superstition, and lack of modernity rule. Rather, it is a way to reveal how centers and peripheries are open to contestations and radical displacement.

Movies can be a channel to represent the voices of the underprivileged though they also work as state apparatus. With empowerment of digital video technology, more independent filmmakers have become engaged in the new politics of marginality and concerned with the struggles of ethnic peoples in Hong Kong. More documentaries and short films are being made with Southeast Asian people as the leading characters. Workshops have been organized to help younger ethnic groups to make their films.¹¹ This ethnic consciousness of Hong Kong filmmakers may lead us to other spaces of power and knowledge and urge us to reflect ethnic subjects in the new theorization of post-1997 cinema in the way that internal borders may be removed and external borders be democratized. Unlike China's "minority nationality film" (*shaosu minzu dianying*) genre that embraces the ethnic Other as a symbol of territorial security concern and a marketable icon to display multicultural diversity, the ethnic border of Hong Kong cinema may offer a chance to re-think ethnicity issues in moments outside state control. Its history can only be represented in terms of constructed identities, not of pure national identity, dependent on a series of encounters with different civilizations.

Notes

- 1 Sun Yat-sen himself was actually also an outsider to China's politics, given his Western medical training, Christian background, and many foreign experiences and connections. Chinese literati at the beginning did not think highly of him, and he had to fight hard to redeem himself. However, *Bodyguards and Assassins* never explored such dynamic dimension of Sun but merely treated him as a flat character.
- 2 Liang Qichao is probably the most prominent scholar who writes extensively about the North–South division in Chinese history. See, for instance, Liang (1936). But Liang, under the ideology of nationalism, never challenges the constructiveness of “Han Chinese nationality” nor elaborates how “Han” groups are divided by separate spoken languages (dubbed dialects), customs and histories.
- 3 The two sequels were *The Greatest Wedding on Earth* (1962) and *The Greatest Love Affair on Earth* (1964). Both scripts were written by renowned writer Zhang Ailing.
- 4 Migrants from northern parts of China were by no means confined to those two categories. In the realm of literature, “*Nanlai zoujia*” (southbound writer 南來作家) is also a well-discussed identity. Indeed, many northern emigrants in the 1950s were proletarians, struggling for survival in colonial Hong Kong.
- 5 The Southeast Asian Film Festival rejected the selection of Cantonese movies in 1956. The incident caused a stir among Cantonese filmmakers. Cantonese actor and filmmaker Ng Cho-fan furiously condemned the rejection of Cantonese films for participation in the Festival (Wong 2003). But a hidden reason for the rejection of Ng's Cantonese productions could be because of their leftist or pro-Communist background.
- 6 A stronger top-down language planning policy was adopted by the Chinese Communist Party in the 1950s to standardize and promote Mandarin Chinese (Putonghua) as the common spoken language of the People's Republic of China.
- 7 Hong Kong Cantonese film declined gradually in late 1960s and early 1970 because of the chaos in the industry and the challenges brought by the increasingly popular Cantonese television and modern-outlook Mandarin cinema. There were no Cantonese movies at all produced in 1972. But it was the Cantonese television that brought life to the Hong Kong Cantonese film industry again in the mid-1970s.
- 8 Those Cantonese and Mandarin films dubbed in Amoy or Chaozhou dialects for Southeast Asian markets are not considered in this category. The first Amoy-dialect film ever released in Hong Kong was *Flirting Scholar* (Tang Bohu dian Qiuxiang, 1950) [its release year in Hong Kong, however, was 1952] and the first Chaozhou-dialect film produced in Hong Kong was *Wang Jinlun* (1955).
- 9 There are increasing numbers of research works on Hong Kong Amoy-dialect films. But there is still very little academic study on Chaozhou-dialect films.
- 10 The fact that the KMT government, whose state policy on language was to discourage use of dialects other than Mandarin, supported production of Hokkien films was considered as another attempt to use film as a propaganda tool to spread Chinese nationalist ideology to local Taiwanese after the Japanese colonialism of the island.
- 11 See, for instance, Tammy Cheung's documentary *Invisible Women* (1993), Zune Kwok's *Homecoming* (2009), Joseph Wu Hong-lun's *Five Minutes* (2009), *The Waterside* (2010),

and *Shabnum, the Dew* (2011). Hong Kong Independent Short Film and Video Awards (ifva), since 2010, has organized video project workshop called “All About Us” for South Asian youths to learn filming and editing techniques.

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Hong Kong Cinema in the Age of Neoliberalization and Mainlandization

Hong Kong SAR New Wave as a Cinema of Anxiety¹

Mirana May Szeto and Yun-chung Chen

Nearly twenty years after Hong Kong returned to Chinese sovereignty, what are the major shifts in Hong Kong culture and cinema in relation to globalization? We will not privilege global / transnational cinemas or other frameworks of globalization studies to formulate these global–local relations. Instead, we argue that “neoliberalization” and “mainlandization” (Szeto and Chen 2011) have become more accurate terms to characterize actually existing problems of globalization that Hong Kong and the Hong Kong film industry are facing today. Their combined impact has drastically altered Hong Kong’s sense of reality, resulting in a different kind of anxiety. In analyzing recent works by established and emerging filmmakers, we discover that Hong Kong has aged depressingly from a culture of budding self-discovery in resistance to “disappearance” and “reverse hallucination” (Abbas 1997: 6), into a middle-aged culture “lost in transition” (Chu 2013), embarrassingly inhibited by blocked horizons and anxious about not moving on. To dovetail this point, we think that Wong Kar-wai’s *The Grandmaster* (2013) is exactly a comeback statement by a Hong Kong New Wave / Second Wave grandmaster, after an embarrassing decade-long mid-career crisis. His silence in face of a post 1997 Hong Kong he no longer knows how to represent is poignantly echoed by other baby-boomer directors like Fruit Chan. *The Midnight After* (2014), Chan’s first feature film on Hong Kong after a similarly long hiatus, is about a van-load of passengers emerging from Lion Rock Tunnel² not knowing what happened to Hong Kong before and what life will become afterwards. Disjointed from historical

time and landed in an uncannily deserted hometown, without familiar time and space to anchor subjectivity, can living in Hong Kong mean anything anymore? This is “lost in transition” anxiety *par excellence*.

Arguably, Hong Kong culture is still a culture in crisis (Cheung and Chu 2004: xv). But is crisis still a useful concept if it is used to describe a constant state of affairs? Is this about crisis management, or management of status quo by way of crisis?

The younger generations, however, are becoming impatient about this extended mid-life crisis and its procrastinatory identity politics of ambiguity, deferral, and “disappearance.” To them, Hong Kong has been “in crisis” and “lost in transition” for thirty years, since the 1984 signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration, without seeing any end to this *longue durée*. It is as long as, if not longer than, their entire lifetime. To them, Hong Kong ought not to defer facing the real any longer; it should find ways to deal with this embarrassing state of anxiety, of symptomatic inhibition (Lacan 2014: 77). All other planes have departed, but passengers of flight Hong Kong are still in the transit hall waiting. Seriously, being stuck in limbo / *bardo* for thirty years is not the temporal-spatial order of mortals. It is the condition of the spectral and the living dead, as Juno Mak’s directorial debut, *Rigor Mortis* (2013) threateningly certify. Mak, born in 1984, flatly says about his film: “There wasn’t room for me. ... It’s a story about middle-aged people dealing with ageing” (*Time Out* 2013). This film, together with *Cold War* (2012), the directorial debut of Longman Leung and Sunny Luk, a film about generational tug-of-war, are representative of what we call Hong Kong SAR New Wave cinema (Szeto and Chen 2012). This cinema exemplifies definitively new diagnoses and approaches to Hong Kong. Together with its new generation of post-80s and post-90s (born after 1980 and 1990) audience, the SAR New Wave has decided to take on Hong Kong’s anxiety in all sorts of new ways.

However, despite the different ways in which the baby-boomer Hong Kong New Wave / Second Wave and the younger SAR New Wave respond to the altered conditions of Hong Kong today, they converge to reconfigure post 1997 Hong Kong SAR cinema as a cinema of anxiety, anxiety being the “Signal of the Real” and “Cause of Desire” (Lacan 2014: 157, 100) in the Lacanian sense. This cinema signals the real in the imaginary space of cinema and provokes the anxieties that cause the desire for analysis of the Symbolic Order / Other (e.g. of Hong Kong, China) and the Hong Kong subject. This anxiety has to do with neoliberalization and mainlandization drastically altering Hong Kong reality in uncanny ways.

Stuck with *Kung fu* and Martial Arts? Hollywood as Proxy of Globalization and the Genre Reification of Hong Kong Cinema

Why are we using neoliberalization rather than globalization as a framework of analysis about the anxiety-provoking conditions of Hong Kong and the Hong Kong film industry? Globalization is an enormous framework to operate. Thus,

scholars have often resorted to proxy analytic frameworks such as the study of global–local relations, transnational, diasporic or translocal relations. In Hong Kong cinema studies, this is often done through the proxy framework of local Hong Kong cinema vis-à-vis the global film market dominated by Hollywood.

The automatic suture of global cinema to Hollywood is typical. Cinema “in its very inception,” “was imagined globally” “as a kind of international language,” and “Hollywood looked beyond the nation to a world market” and “an international division of labor” (Kapur and Wagner 2012: 6). Global cinema studies often focus on Hollywood’s clout as the arbitrator of what local cinemas mean globally. Hollywood distribution “cheaply acquired” Hong Kong *kung fu* / martial arts films and globalized them throughout “the Second and Third World” through B-circuit “cultural dumping” (Willemsen 2005; Stern 2010: 196–7). Hollywood quickly incorporates creative elements from other cinemas, denying the original stars and filmmakers brand-recognition in the US, as exemplified by Scorsese’s import substitution: remaking Andrew Lau and Alan Mak’s *Infernal Affairs* (2002 and 2003) as *The Departed* (2006), and winning the Academy Award for Best Picture to boot. Even if original directors “remake” their own films “in and for Hollywood,” as the Pang brothers’ *Bangkok Dangerous* (1999, 2008) (Lim 2011:16, 27), this “ambition to globalize” based on isolated Hollywood successes is still “illusory.” “Undiminished dominance of US distribution” continues to determine market access of foreign films; the US replaces “overseas niche successes with domestic versions”; and escalating blockbuster production cost curtails competition (Walsh 2007: 175).

Ironically, when transnational film studies reverse the Hollywood-Hong Kong hierarchy to show the agency of Hong Kong cinema in localizing creative elements from Hollywood, unconscious Hollywood-centrism still exists in the reversed binary. For example, Heffernan sees a “tradition of working localized variations on Hollywood hits” as the reason for the success of *Golden Harvest*, taking the horror genre as example. However, he does not recognize that “the white-garbed ghost” (Heffernan 2009: 60–61) is a Chinese staple as much as a Hollywood motif, and that Hong Kong genre cinema draws creative resource not only from Hollywood but also from a long culture of Chinese folk tales and literature on martial arts, romance, and ghost genres that have survived in Hong Kong film and print media while being censored in China and Taiwan during the Cold War.

Transnational genre studies have also shown how the globalization of Hong Kong action genres can exceed the orientalist East–West binary by being transnational. Against the assumption that Hong Kong action cinema can globalize simply because it is non-verbal and thus universally translatable, Jayamanne shows how Jackie Chan failed in Hollywood at first by relying on just that. He succeeded on second trial through building “transnational kinship” ties with minority native American, African-American audiences, crossing “phobic ethnic boundaries,” and making “Black Minstrelsy” and “miscegenation” “cool” (Jayamanne 2005: 155–159). Non-hegemonic East–South transnationalism also exists, like Bulawayo’s transmutation of Hong Kong *kung fu* cinema to shape their “agitprop” theater and community

activism (Stern 2010). Horizontal, intra-Asian intertextuality is also evident. The Hong Kong “*wuxia*-cum-historical-epic genre” was incorporated into South Korean and Bollywood filmmaking. Stephen Chow’s nonsense *kung fu* comedy genre got adapted in Japan (Lim 2011: 16–17; Vitali 2010). However, all these examples together cannot but prove that Hong Kong cinema achieves its extraordinary transnational reach as glocalizable (Robertson 1995) commodities only in terms of the *kung fu* / martial arts genre that Hollywood has chosen to globalize. Triumph is also curse when Hong Kong cinema achieves global visibility through being stigmatized as a *kung fu* / action cinema by audiences and much film scholarship alike.

Neoliberalization with Colonial Characteristics: Impact on Hong Kong Film

Film studies also tend to take globalization as a context rather than a theory of global capital’s operational logic. We argue that neoliberalism is finally giving globalization studies a theory that can analyze existing global economic assumptions and forms of governance and how they are localized. It also allows us to integrate the analysis of the political economy at large with the analysis of cultural politics in films to show the relation between macro dynamics of the glocalization of neoliberalism and the micro-politics of local cultural responses (Kapur and Wagner 2012: 4). By studying the two scales of analysis relationally, we see how the material condition of cultural production is being adversely shaped by both global neoliberal political economy and specific translocal cultural conditions, and how their impact on the Hong Kong film industry is anxiously articulated in films.

China, Britain, and the US drove the global dominance of neoliberal governance, which led to the “lionization of the free market,” “deregulation” of capital and labor protection, outsourcing, the withdrawal of the state from welfare provisions, the “privatization of social resources,” and “private property” ownership buoyed by credit financing (Smith 2011; Harvey 2005). This has resulted in greater social disparity.

Neoliberalization in Hong Kong went through extra colonial and Chinese turns. Concepts like “Empire” (Hardt and Negri 2000) and “New Imperialism” (Harvey 2003) have tried to associate aspects of colonization and imperialism with globalization and neoliberalism, but fail to explain beyond rhetoric how the transition from “colonization” to “neoliberalization” actually works. We discover in retrospect that colonial Hong Kong actually operated on a logic uncannily similar to neoliberalism after World War II. While most Western democracies moved towards welfare-state policies, Hong Kong’s colonial administration embraced “laissez-faire” as “the principle of non-intervention” in order to produce “acceptable boundaries between public and private interests” within a non-democratic political system based in fact on “the partnership between colonialism and capitalism”

(Goodstadt 2005:119, 13). It avoided Western welfare-state interventions and developmental state protectionism (Szeto and Chen 2011: 241; Chen and Pun 2007: 71). Thus, neoliberalization in postcolonial Hong Kong does not have many welfare-state policies to “roll-back.” It simply intensifies the “rolling-forward” of pre-existing neoliberal-like policies. What is new in postcolonial neoliberalization is the “roll-out” (Peck and Tickell 2002) of policies that actively assist in capital accumulation, which Mark Purcell candidly calls “aidez-faire” (Purcell 2008: 15). This refers to pro-market policies such as indirect subsidies to assist capital accumulation. The HK\$100 million Film Development Fund, HK\$50 million Film Guarantee Fund, and the Film Development Council established to advise the government on spending HK\$300 million to revitalize the film industry are some such policies (Chan, Fung and Ng 2010: 26–27).

Accordingly, “[s]o successful was the colonial administration in making *laissez-faire* ... an integral part of the Hong Kong outlook,” no “political party in Hong Kong sought to challenge the legitimacy” of this set of doctrines “in economic management before 1997” or after. The policy is even enshrined in Hong Kong’s Basic Law (Goodstadt 2005: 122, 13). Moreover, the legalization and institutionalization of monopolies and procedural injustices that are trademarks of euphemized colonial governance trickily continues in large measure after 1997, allowing a rather seamless transition from “colonial” to “global” neoliberal exploitation on discursive and practical levels. This allows institutional and business elite more clout to globalize neoliberalism through existing institutions and discourses. Colonial injustice continues to haunt us as the living dead. Thus, ironically, instead of being recognized as a structural consequence of neoliberalism, the 1997 Asian economic crisis was misrecognized as a cause for intensified market deregulation, state divestment, and fiscal austerity, leading to greater polarization, distress, and anxiety among the citizenry.

Disquieting polarization is also evident in the film industry. The increasing dominance of Hollywood and Chinese film markets is the result of neoliberalization and population size (Kapur and Wagner 2012: 4, 7, 8). Since Deng Xiaoping, neoliberalism became the steering ideology of Chinese market “reform and liberation” (*Gaige kaifang*) (Harvey 2005). The end of Martial Law in Taiwan was also due to pressures of neoliberalization and democratization. Thus, severe censorship and state controlled market conditions in these Sinophone cinemas protecting Hong Kong from regional competition were eroded. Moreover, film distribution is monopolistic in China. It became the world’s largest film market outside the US in 2013. Its box office is “set to pass the US in seven years” (Pulver 2013). This is a structural policy result of selective market liberalization that threatens smaller local cinemas like Hong Kong.

Moreover, deregulation of the global film market allows increasing mergers and monopolization of film distribution and exhibition that privileges global blockbusters, while withdrawing government protection for small national cinemas. This led to the collapse of art-house cinemas globally, making it difficult for Hong

Kong's type of independent, small filmmaking companies to access mainstream screens, even with much critical acclaim. While other Asian national cinemas with sizeable local populations like Korea, India, and China can rely on the national market to survive, Hong Kong's small population makes foreign markets a necessity³ (Szeto and Chen 2011: 254–255). But foreign markets are shrinking at fearful speed.

Hong Kong's combined conditions of residual coloniality and neoliberal governance further intensified the decline of its film industry in the 1990s. Colonial Hong Kong cultural policy prioritized the image of the departing colonial bureaucracy at the expense of local cultural industries. The non-democratic colonial government insisted on *laissez-faire* / non-intervention policy to protect itself from charges of state-business collusion to the extent that it allowed Hong Kong film, its most important cultural industry, to dwindle unaided in the 1990s, forcing the industry to develop culturally unsustainable strategies of survival that rely increasingly on the Chinese market.⁴

Mainlandization, the Disquieting Binary Impasse: China or the Rest?

While post-WTO China liberates its markets, censorship and protective measures still apply, due to national interest and security. This “neoliberalism with Chinese characteristics” (Harvey 2005: 120–151; Szeto and Chen 2011) couples tight ideological censorship with selective, controlled market liberalization (Wang 2004). A spectrum of preferential market liberalization measures are extended to the Hong Kong SAR but not to foreign countries under the mainland and Hong Kong Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement (CEPA) in 2004.⁵ These privileges coupled with declining local and Asian markets accelerate the restructuring of the Hong Kong film industry towards *mainlandization*. The seeming rebound of the Hong Kong film industry is often attributed to CEPA policies. But at what cost?

To maximize CEPA privileges through the Hong Kong-China co-production platform, film scripts must pass State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT) censorship before shooting. Final cuts must pass censorship again for screening permission. This forces the industry to preemptively self-censor throughout the creative process. The mainlandization of cultural content in Hong Kong–China co-productions refers to this tailoring of cultural content to SARFT parameters on what is acceptable in mainland China⁶ and not to essentialist assumptions about Chinese tastes. However, mainlandized, deodorized films tend to find “the more liberal Hong Kong and South East Asian markets harder to penetrate,” a producer / distributor for China and Asian markets laments. Conversely, “films made for the Hong Kong and South East Asian markets may contain content excluded” by SARFT (Interview 2, 2010). The Hong Kong ghost genre, popular all over Asia, is censored for promoting superstition; ghost films are rarely made any more.⁷ So, irrespective of the

potential openness and diversity of the Chinese audience, state censorship imposes an artificial cultural divide, forcing the Hong Kong industry to choose between China or the rest.⁸ The coupling of neoliberalization and mainlandization forces the industry into a disquieting dilemma (Szeto and Chen 2011).

The Hong Kong–China co-production model allows established and above-the-line creative Hong Kong talents and investors to make it big beyond Hong Kong, often faring better in China, calling the shots and setting-up industry conventions. Hong Kong producer John Shum can challenge anyone to name a “big Chinese blockbuster without Hong Kong people in significant roles” (Interview 3, 2010). Dadi Media, which he co-established, owns the fastest-growing cinema chain in China, the sixth-largest in 2012, boasting 1290 screens and aggregating RMB 1 billion in annual box-office (*Yisizixun* 2013). It succeeds through championing price restructuring: quickly increasing the number of screens in second- and third-tier cities and towns, driving competition to push ticket prices down to RMB\$19, nearing 1 percent of local median monthly salary (like mature markets), so that cinema-going quickly turns from a cosmopolitan elite affair to an affordable, widespread quotidian pass-time (Interview 3, 2010; *MP Finance* 2013). Hong Kong producer / director Peter Chan also opened a production house in Shanghai and soon became the first Hong Kong director to achieve phenomenal Chinese box-office with *Warlords* (2007), which hinted about state corruption and the suffering multitude, themes that are close to Chinese hearts. Chan’s equivocal remark says it all: Hong Kong films were “made in Hong Kong” in the past but will “definitely be made by Hong Kong” in the future (Interview 1, 2008).

To pacify the anxiety about mainlandization gobbling up the space for Hong Kong cultural identity, cultural critics suggested the “teleportation” (*a la Star Trek*) of Hong Kong culture to China, in terms of ideas, sensibilities, industry conventions, as a covert form of Hong Kong cultural survival (Lee 2009; Lo 2010; Pun 2012). This idea replaces import substitution with *export substitution* as a sign of cultural / industrial innovation. Is this not *intranational diasporic* cultural transmigration, or displaced self-mimicry? Is this not another problematic twist to identity politics of the 1980 to 90s emigrant generation? Moreover, this imagined “Hongkongization” (Szeto 2006) through teleportation of Hong Kong culture comes with a heavy toll: the survival and success of above-the-line, baby-boomer generation talents actually depends on the sacrifice of Hong Kong junior level talents as jobs migrate to China. It is a “winner-take-all” phenomenon.

According to an important SAR New Wave director, young Hong Kong creative talents focused on local stories are confronted with an investment environment increasingly favoring projects targeting China. It takes many compromises to get such films made. The near monopoly of distribution in China makes it difficult for such films to access Chinese screens. Even if they do, without *guanxi* and bargaining power, they find it difficult to navigate the cumbersome and arbitrary censorship process, avoid bureaucratic quagmires, and overcome red tape. They also have trouble collecting due profit shares from Chinese companies. All these make small

and medium Hong Kong productions disproportionately risky financially (Interview 4, 2010). The hurdles of China's selective market liberalization are stacked against them. Moreover, many below-the-line interviewees lament that Hong Kong crew members need to take pay cuts, accept exploitation, and travel North without *per diem* to compete, or they have to leave the industry all together, making such careers unsustainable (Interviews 5 and 6, 2009; Szeto and Chen 2013). As a result, the industry sees a severe shortage of younger talents and clear succession problems. This is why the SAR New Wave film *Rigor Mortis*, while answering the call for succession by a reinvigorating tribute to the Hong Kong hoping zombie / vampire genre banned in China, is at the same time a horrifying statement about the older generation devouring the young and the specters of China crowding out the space of quotidian Hong Kong.

Mainlandization nevertheless, will continue to intensity. As cinema-going becomes more affordable and widespread in China, the taste of the massive Chinese audience becomes more influential. Recently, Chinese films that are grounded in local concerns and sensitivities have become phenomenally successful. *Lost in Thailand* (Xu Zheng, 2012), a hilarious film about a foreign business trip frustrated by a country bumpkin migrant worker achieved second-highest local box-office (US\$197.4 million). *Finding Mr. Right* (Xue Xiaolu, 2013), a taming-of-the-shrew romance-comedy about the mistress of a Beijing big-shot delivering their illegal child in Seattle grossed US\$82.7 million locally. Zhao Wei's directorial debut *So Young* (2013), a post-80s college-to-yuppie *Bildungsroman* grossed US\$114.7 million in China. As preferences of Chinese moviegoers, especially the major demography of youthful post-80s and post-90s are continuously shifting towards domestic releases (Cieply 2013),⁹ mainlandization of Chinese co-production will definitely follow. Peter Chan's *American Dreams in China* (2013) for example, plunges directly into the psyche of China's mainstream, Tian'anmen-generation nouveau riche, their inferiority complex, and money-makes-right vindication vis-à-vis America. With Chinese script and production, this mainland "I Did It My Way" statement won phenomenal box-office and best film, director, and actor at China's Golden Rooster Awards 2013.

This transition from making quintessential Hong Kong films to complete mainlandization is a complex decision. We have shown elsewhere how Stephen Chow's career demonstrates the dilemma. He moved from *Shaolin Soccer* (2001), a proud Hong Kong film refusing to bow to the Chinese market, to successfully globalizing while maintaining local appeal in *Kungfu Hustle* (2004), and choosing China against the rest in *CJ7* (2008), at the expense of halving the profits of *Kungfu Hustle* (Szeto and Chen 2012). His decision to completely mainlandize in terms of casting and cultural sensitivities in *Journey to the West: Conquering the Demons* (2013) made it the third-highest-grossing film in China (US\$196.7 million), dwarfing the Hong Kong, Malaysia, and Singaporean markets at only 1.8, 1.6, and 0.8 percent of China's. Chinese market share increased from 0 to 55 percent from *Shaolin Soccer* to this film. The ontological definition of Hong Kong cinema is called into question by such phenomenal success of Hong Kong-China co-productions.

Table 4.1 The box office of three films

	<i>The Grandmaster</i> (2012)		<i>Cold War</i> (2012) ^b		<i>Rigor Mortis</i> (2013) ^c	
	Box Office (US\$)	Share (%)	Box Office (US\$)	Share (%)	Box Office (US\$)	Share (%)
Hong Kong	2,742,753	4.3	5,524,043	11.1	2,211,990	62.8
China	45,270,000	71.1	40,640,000	81.5		
Taiwan ^a	1,366,313	2.1	688,333	1.4	506,667	14.4
Southeast Asia	1,126,328	1.8	2,935,193	5.9	797,049	22.6
Japan	2,330,211	3.7		0.0		
Europe	3,336,556	5.2		0.0		
USA	6,594,959	10.4		0.0	7,865	0.2
Others	179,988	0.3	83,594	0.2		
Total	63,630,256	100	49,871,163	100	2,726,522	100

Source: Figures derived from Box Office Mojo (<http://www.boxofficemojo.com>) 13 June 2014.

^aBox office data from Taiwan derived from website <http://dorama.info> 13 June 2014.

^bThe box office of *Cold War in China* derived from website <http://58921.com/> website 13 June 2014.

^c*Rigor Mortis* was not intended to screen in mainland China, according to the director Juno Mak.

Younger SAR New Wave and other Hong Kong New Wave / Second Wave directors have obviously experimented with other tactics. We have analyzed the alternative responses of a new slate of anti-heroic comedies elsewhere (Szeto and Chen 2012; Szeto 2014). Here we want to focus on films definitive of the cinema of anxiety as a result of the combined effects of mainlandization and neoliberalization. They include two SAR New Wave films, *Rigor Mortis* (2013) and *Cold War* (2012), and the Hong Kong Second Wave film *The Grandmaster* (2013), all representing different approaches.

Juno Mak's *Rigor Mortis* represents the defiantly localist–globalist approach that bypasses China. It was applauded locally for reinventing a uniquely Hong Kong genre, paying tribute to *Mr. Vampire* (1985), which launched the hybrid, hopping-vampire / zombie (*geongsi*), horror-comedy genre. It also received good reviews at festivals worldwide and secured distribution in North America and the rest of Asia. It knows it will do well even if it is banned in China for its “superstitious” genre. It proves how the SAR New Wave can refuse to mainlandize, cut nonsense humor and slapstick, insist on somber social issues, and still thrive by relying on traditional local and regional markets alone: Hong Kong (62.8 percent), Taiwan (14.4 percent), and Southeast Asia (22.6 percent).

Longman Leung and Suny Luk's *Cold War* not only did very well in traditional Hong Kong (11.1%) and Southeast Asian (5.9 percent) markets, but also did extremely well in China (81 percent of global market share). The film is supposed to be SARFT censorship fodder. Its theme of systemic failure and corruption in contemporary law and order (in Hong Kong) is a sensitive issue in China. A scene

of the hijacking of police officers, the public uproar in the film, and the attempt on the life of the Police Commissioner all beg SARFT censorship wrath. Moreover, there is not one actor or actress from China. The film breaks all assumptions about mainland market viability and makes none of the compromises of co-productions. It found its way into mainland film screens as an import film, which means that it received a lower share of the box office than a Hong Kong–China co-production. However, through help from experienced producers, it achieved the near-impossible: keeping most of its edgy cultural-political implications while garnering a record-breaking US\$40.6 million mainland box-office. Its persistent subversion of industry assumptions is itself a near-suicidal act that makes two points: (1) not to give in on sensitive local cultural issues and sensitivities, and (2) to trust the open-mindedness, political sensibilities, and critical awareness of the mainland audience. They appreciate the ability to say critical things in the Chinese context. Mainlandization can look suffocating when dealing with the state, but the inter-local, quotidian, horizontal level of cultural dialogue can be full of pleasant surprises.

Wong Kar-wai's *The Grandmaster* competes on a totally different level. It trumps both the national / mainlandization and localist imperatives by claiming the entire world of *kung fu* / martial arts. The most fascinating part of the film is the making-of documentary-cum-book, which Wong calculatingly uses to conquer Chinese hearts together with Hong Kong and global audiences. The film's promotion focuses on Wong's decade long ethnographical pilgrimage to all surviving *kung fu* masters around the world. The erudite knowledge he accumulated about Chinese martial arts impressed several *kung fu* masters so much, they wanted to make him a disciple (Wong 2013). He also documented the stars, Tony Leung (from Hong Kong), Zhang Ziyi (China) and Chang Chen (Taiwan) – a Sinophone world trio, practicing real *kung fu* painstakingly. Chang's role is cut almost entirely from the film, but his presence as a *bajiquan* champion of a national Chinese martial arts competition as a result of his dedication to acting his role adds great cultural capital to the hype. The film's key thesis is to show how Hong Kong, and the Cantonese grandmaster Ip Man, both have the ability to see beyond the essentialist North–South, local–national, Chinese–foreign binary impasses towards the survival of the culture and world of martial arts at large. This is an attempt to show how Hong Kong's cosmopolitan worldview can claim Hong Kong, China, and all the world at one fell swoop, proven by its US\$63.6 million global box-office, with 71 percent from China, while maintaining draw in traditional markets like Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Southeast Asia.

However, all these admirable efforts and positive market signals cannot dispel the anxiety about creative contents of Hong Kong SAR cinema: there is a pervasive urgency to deal with the anxiety-provoking conditions of neoliberalization and mainlandization in the Hong Kong film industry and Hong Kong society at large. This is a long-term predicament that the jubilation of a Hong Kong film revival cannot allay.

Hong Kong SAR New Wave and the Cinema of Anxiety

Take One: *Rigor Mortis* (2013) – The Theory

The present transformation of Hong Kong film is led by a new generation of filmmakers coming of age in socio-economic and cultural conditions very different from the roaring 1980s. They have to adjust to a prolonged economic downturn after 1997, a neoliberalizing, bifurcated market, and the pressures of mainlandization. We call them the “SAR New Wave” (*Hong Kong Film* 2010: 84), characterized as the generation of directors who are either (1) new directors coming of age and garnering serious local critical attention after Hong Kong became a Special Administrative Region of China (HKSAR); or (2) directors who joined the industry earlier, but have only gained serious local critical attention and / or acclaim after 1997; but most importantly, (3) directors who are consciously and critically aware of themselves as working from a local condition very different from pre-1997 Hong Kong, who tend to offer more internally varied and inter-locally related portrayals of the local, question vertical, binary identity politics against colonial and national centers (i.e., move beyond the 1997 fixation), and whose worldview departs from the chauvinist petit-grandiose Hong Kongism, a colonial inferiority complex typical of mainstream Hong Kong (Szeto 2006). This SAR New Wave tends to offer the most interesting cultural indicators of change. They arrive on the scene in a Hong Kong that the baby-boomer Hong Kong New Wave / Second Wave no longer know how to handle. Everything looks uncannily familiar, but the rules of the game have changed. Hong Kong literally gets what it wants, status quo, and continued prosperity beyond 1997, but *Poverty in the Midst of Affluence* (Goodstadt 2013) is a strangely disquieting *jouissance* to have.

In his seminar on anxiety, Lacan, “clearly sets out where he disagrees with” Freud’s “theory of anxiety ... in *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety* (Freud 1926).” For Lacan, “the signal of anxiety is not in the ego but ‘in the ideal ego’” (Diatkine 2006), the imaginary. Esther Cheung nails it in the title of her new book on Hong Kong culture, *The Uncanny on the Frame* (Cheung 2014).

To Lacan, the uncanny, the *unheimlich*, the *objet petit a*, appears exactly on the frame, between the imaginary and the real. To Lacan, “the field of anxiety is situated as something framed” strangely. The stage, and by extension, cinema, “allows for the emergence in the world of that which *may not* be said,” i.e., the *objet petit a* (Lacan 2014:75), the remainder / reminder of what Hong Kong culture (the Symbolic Order / Other) dumps into its cultural unconscious, refuses to deal with, denies, fails to recognize and symbolize, as if it does not exist.

To Lacan, “the relation between the stage and the world” (Lacan 2014: 75), and by extension, cinema and the world, is the relation between the imaginary and the real. This relation is like the strange phenomenon of the Möbius strip. The remnant of the real, the *objet petit a*, is like an ant walking on the Möbius strip from one side



Figure 4.1 The vengeful teenage twin ghosts in the mirror in *Rigor Mortis* (Juno Mak, 2013). Although they are twins, only one is caught in the mirror, but the mirroring forces them out of Chin's body, exposing their doubleness, their duplicity.

to the other, from the imaginary to the real, without obstruction, but also without exit. The two sides of the Möbius strip are one and the same. The *objet petit a* “enters the world of the real, to which, in fact, it is simply returning.” This “specular image” is an “uncanny and invasive image of the double” (Lacan 2014: 97–99), the ghost in the mirror.

By framing the *objet petit a*, the spectral in the mirror of reality, art can force it out from hiding, from controlling and taking over the human subject unconsciously. Since the imaginary and the real are the same and the one-and-other side(s) of Möbius reality, framing *objet petit a*, symbolizing it in the imaginary realm of the film, is also forcing oneself to confront its reality, to confront the murdered / forgotten reality of which it is a persistent reminder / remainder.

The cinema of anxiety is one which dares to take on this *objet petit a* of anxiety, which is “the appearance, within this framing, of what was already there ... at home, *Heim*,” as an “unknown occupant” (Ibid.). This occupant appears to be disturbingly unexpected and unknown not because it is new, but because it is “that which is *Heim*,” that which is already at home, but “has never passed through the sieve of recognition. It has stayed *unheimlich*, not so much inhabitable as in-habiting, not so much in-habitual as in-habituated” (Lacan 2014: 76). It provokes anxiety not because it is unacceptable / inhabitable, but because it is not admitted / in-habituated by our version of reality; not because it is unfamiliar / in-habitual, but because this uncanny / *unheimlich* object / Other is inhabiting the *Heim*. Thus, anxiety “isn’t about the loss of the object, but its presence.” The *objet petit a* “causes anxiety not because it might be lost,” like any other common object, as is imagined in nostalgia’s fetishization of the disappearing Hong Kong culture as a “love at last sight” (Abbas 1997: 21), but “because it might have to be shared” (Lacan 2014: 54). That is, the imagined Perverse Other (i.e. the capitalist Other / Order – neoliberalism – mediated by the

Chinese national Order / Other – mainlandization, both with demands on us that are excessive, boundless) also demands to enjoy “it.” Thus, anxiety is also about the imaginary competition of *jouissance*, the competition with the Perverse Other / Order over the imagined object of love, of desire. What is not expected is that “it” turns out to be not the familiar object of love, but the uncanny *objet petit a*.

“Anxiety is the cut,” as a cut could do in film. It “opens up” a gap in the Other / culture and in the self, “affording a view of ... the unexpected.” It is the “*presentiment*, ... the *pré-sentiment*, prior to the first appearance of a feeling.” Thus, anxiety is prior to feelings “whose perception is prepared and structured” (Lacan 2014: 76). In other words, anxiety is an affect (Lacan 2014: 18) not yet processed. “It’s unfastened” to any meaning. It “drifts about. It can be found displaced, maddened, inverted, or metabolized, but it isn’t repressed” (Lacan 2014: 14). “*There’s no lack*” (Lacan 2014: 54) in anxiety.

The SAR New Wave is a cinema of anxiety, a clinical and forensic science of the real. It tries to catch the *objet petit a* of Hong Kong culture, which the Hong Kong subject is unaware of. It examines the skeletons in the closet and present their contexts and histories in ethnographic, archaeological, and genealogical detail. It makes earnest effort to see what is there. It consciously takes stock of what is to be salvaged, understood, and transformed. It reckons with cultural landscapes and ways of life literally disappearing unawares, and conserves this culture and way of life for Hong Kong before an undifferentiated vision of Chinese developmentalism, neoliberal city makeovers, and cross-border infrastructural integration with China delete them from our cultural-political consciousness.

Rigor Mortis is a paradigmatic SAR New Wave film of anxiety in the above sense. Hong Kong’s deliberately forgotten real poverty in the midst of affluence is uncannily captured in *Rigor Mortis*, Latin for “stiffness of death.” The earlier Hong Kong *geongsi* (Chinese vampire-zombie) horror-comedy genre was popular between the signing of the Sino-British Declaration (1984) and the aftermath of the 1989 Tian’anmen Massacre, around 1992 (Liu 2014), when Hong Kong, a Cold War frontier colonial city, first contemplated the horror of returning to Communist China.

Gone is the self-reassuring humor of that decade. In *Rigor Mortis*, Chin Siu-ho from the original *Mr. Vampire*, playing himself, is world weary, down-on-his-luck and past-his-prime, like Hong Kong film and the obsolete *geongsi* genre, moving back to where he came from, the quintessential Hong Kong public housing estate, to end his miserable life. Quotidian Hong Kong is now a bleak and deserted place, awaiting urban redevelopment, populated by a handful of abandoned souls, the elderly poor, a traumatized waif Feng (Kara Hui), and her lonely albino child, Pak (i.e., Little White). Together they form a microcosm of five generations of Hong Kong poor, echoing sociologist Lui Tai-lok’s popular booklet *Four Generations of Hong Kong* (2007).

1. Neoliberalism is “dead but dominant”

Capital is dead labor, that, vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labor, and lives the more, the more labor it sucks.

Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume One

Lui's first generation is born in the 1920s to 1930s, many of whom escaped from war-torn China to Hong Kong. They are Uncle Tung (Richard Ng Yiu-hon) and wife Auntie Mui (Nina Paw Hee-ching) in the film. Auntie, unable to let go of her attachment to her dead husband, goes to extraordinary lengths to bring him back as vampire-zombie, the living dead. To do so, she fed him the only child left in the housing complex, Pak, the millennial generation born after 2000, the fifth generation, unaccounted for in Lui. Notably, the Uncle-Tung-turned vampire-*geongsi* in the film does not wear traditional Qing dynasty attire like those in the *geongsi* genre of the 1980s, but the hood of the Western angel of death. It is a hybrid vampire-*geongsi*, representing glocalized capital: spirits of colonial injustice supposed to be gone in 1997, but in fact still live on within even more malevolently vampiric institutional bodies in Beijing and Hong Kong.

Against Lui's positive portrayal of the first generation as sacrificial parents, the film uncannily reframes these hard-working laborers behind Hong Kong's capitalist take-off into their victimizers. This Möbius representational twist puts into our cultural imaginary the disavowed, forgotten cause of problems in the real, gerontocratic, vampiric, neoliberal capital, devouring the only representative of the future, Pak. This vampire-*geongsi* symbolizes in the imaginary the Perverse Other / Order of capital, whose demands exceeds all boundaries, whose amoral *jouissance* knows no bounds. The only two remaining third-generation Hong Kong subjects, traumatized Chin and Feng, the parent figures to Pak, are inhibited by anxiety and powerless against this pervasive force.

Neoliberal-capitalism-as-vampire is indeed a disavowed source of Hong Kong's anxiety. Hong Kong people used to identify with the neoliberal, laissez-faire policy as the formula of their capitalist success. It is Hong Kong commonsense itself. However, since the 1997–8 Asian economic crisis and 2007–08 financial tsunami, it has turned into the *unheimlich*, horrifying other. In 1998, Hong Kong, the freest city in the world according to neoliberal criteria, did not yet recognize neoliberalism as the cause of the problem. However by 2008, Hong Kong people were shocked into recognizing neoliberalization as a bifurcating, “winner-take-all” phenomenon. When Hong Kong's rich–poor gap tops all OECD countries despite rising GDP in 2010 (Lau 2010: 20),¹⁰ mainly due to the aggregate effects of neoliberal deregulation of the finance and real-estate markets since 1999, even local presses traditionally taking the neoliberal stance acknowledged the need to evaluate the efficacy of neoliberal orthodoxy.

Real estate speculation is the *raison d'être* of many Hong Kong people. But deregulation of the market and privatization of urban planning have put so much decision-making power into the hands of private developers and semi-public Urban

Renewal Authority and Town Planning Board, which collude with relevant government departments, that housing has become unaffordable for the majority of Hong Kong people, younger generations in particular. The increasing number of gated communities and gentrification of old communities are driving out papa-mama stores everywhere. Real estate economy has uncannily become “real-estate hegemony,” a household umbrella term for disparities cause by neoliberal governance.¹¹

In the film, this is the reason for the demise of local shops selling glutinous rice (the talisman Taoist priests use to manage *geongsi*), which belonged to first generation Hong Kong people. The glutinous rice in the Taoist priest Yau’s (Anthony Chan Yau) hand is the partial object left over from the traumatic real loss of quotidian Hong Kong. He laments:

“In the old days, all successful vampire hunters had special relationships with the best rice shops.” Rice, like their Taoist craft, was “really worth something.” “But since all the vampires have miraculously vanished, along go all vampire hunters.”

First-generation Hong Kong people could rely on hard work and artisanship to make a decent living. However, this is no longer possible in today’s postindustrial, neoliberal Hong Kong.

Yau and his sinister foil Gau (Chung Fat, who dabbles in dark Taoist arts), correspond to Lui’s second generation, the baby-boomers born between 1946 and 1966, who are in control and whose agenda shapes Hong Kong today. They are the Taoist vampire-hunters, the only generation in the film with the managerial technology and experience to keep the Perverse Others (ghosts and *geongsi*) at bay and under control. These Perverse Orders and others (*petits objets a*) haunting the housing estate (home, *Heim*) include the Uncle-Tung-turned vampire-*geongsi* (by implication, vampiric capital), the towering procession of ghosts in traditional Chinese attire (by implication the enormous mainland China factor), and the vengeful teenage-twin ghosts (the forgotten fourth generation Hong Kong victims wronged by the baby-boomer father-figure). The baby-boomers are however, also the generation that created the ghosts and *geongsi* in the first place. They are the most obscenely consumerist and neoliberalist generation that exploited all resources of the past and future generations, and the generation most in denial of their role in the horror, both inside and outside the film.

In the film, Feng’s husband, a baby-boomer, raped the teenage twins he was privately tutoring at home. This is the ultimate act of exploitation and betrayal that produced the twin ghosts. Gau is the one who unscrupulously strangled Uncle Tung to satisfy his desire for *geongsi*-making experimentation and who taught Auntie Mui how to turn her husband’s body into a *geongsi*. To trap the twin ghosts, Gau is willing to let them take over Chin’s body and soul. The cigarettes Gau smokes to prolong his life are made from the ashes of the unborn.

Against these horrific fathers / Others, Chin and Feng, parent figures to Pak, could do nothing to save their child and themselves. They belong to Lui’s third

generation, born between 1967 and 1975. They are the powerless, anxious generation, whose only strategy is suicidal terrorism, to perish with the enemy (Lacan's *passage à l'acte*).

The vengeful ghosts of the twins are *les objets petit a*, the reminders / remainders of the real unrecognized anger of the fourth generation (born in the 1980s and 1990s, called the post-80s and post-90s in local parlance). Indeed, the legitimacy of the post-80s' and post-90s' anger is what the baby-boomer generation is in denial of. This anger is also the *objet petit a* of Lui, who is a baby-boomer. He symptomatically portrays the fourth generation as middle-class youths living in material abundance and overprotected by baby-boomer parents. He is in complete denial of the less fortunate and more critically aware among the third and fourth generations. But the younger generations are rightfully angry with the reality baby-boomers have left them. Are not Occupy Wall Street, Tahrir Square, and recent massive youth activism in Hong Kong real reminders enough?

The only person left alive in the film is the baby-boomer Taoist priest, Yau. He is able to manage having dinner and watching TV with the mild ghosts of yore at home. But even his managerial technology is no longer sophisticated enough to deal with the mutant monsters of their generation's own making: the vengeful spirits of the youthful twins merging with the body of the gerontocratic vampire.

However, the younger generations, like the post-80s director Juno Mak (himself the son of a famous local tycoon and financial market maverick), have intimate knowledge of the problem. Their generation is able to realize that although the global economic meltdown lingering in Europe exposed the "failure of neoliberalism on its own economic terms," many of the policies and institutions it created are still "powerfully in place," like the living dead. Neoliberalism is "dead but dominant" (Smith 2011). Its imposed structural adjustments continue to be suffered by "the 99 percent" globally. Increasingly, the younger generations in Hong Kong are perceiving this as a result of structural colonial injustice ruthlessly institutionalized in the name of global neoliberalization driven by the post-1997 government-business growth-coalition in Beijing and Hong Kong (Goodstadt 2005: 223, 226–228, 2013: 1–56; *Mingpao* 2010).

2. Mainlandization as Spectral "Neocolonial" presence

Consequently, mainlandization takes on more sinister "neocolonial" meanings in mainstream Hong Kong culture. In the film, the entire living space of local people is haunted / colonized by a towering spectral procession in traditional Chinese attire, a force much grander in scale than humans and locals. Feng and Pak are reduced to beggars at their mercy, feeding on the offerings people made to them. China is framed as these giant specters.

Indeed, gradual integration with and competition from Chinese cities and increasing inter-local interaction in daily life and social media has heightened Hong Kong people's awareness about the inter-local nature of injustice, exploitation, and political repression. Politically, the Beijing–Hong Kong ruling elite continued to



Figure 4.2 Spectral Chinese forces towering over Hong Kong people, colonizing, haunting their entire living space in *Rigor Mortis* (Juno Mak, 2013).

obstruct democratization in Hong Kong and China. The disparity between dissenting activists, journalists, intellectuals, and artists against China's monumental stability-maintenance system is perceived as increasingly suffocating. Economically, due to the asymmetrical scale between the colossal Chinese consuming / investing public and the Hong Kong free market, Hong Kong, once a proud shoppers' paradise, finds itself overwhelmed by mainlanders competing for real estate properties, safe health care, clean food, and places in its liberal education system. In 2013, Hong Kong received a record-high 54.3 million visitors, 75 percent of whom were from China (Tourism Commission 2013), constituting more than five times the local population. Tiny Hong Kong is overwhelmed by the neoliberal deregulation of tourism. Coupled with gradual immigration from China, intensified transborder relations are now perceived as a disturbing erosion of Hong Kong's core values and ways of life. China is seen less as a developmentalist blessing than a threat of mainlandization, understood in a xenophobic manner as the infiltration of negatively perceived mainland cultural habits: the increase in corruption and decrease in consumer and citizen rights, the invasion of global brand-name chain-stores serving mainland tourists pricing out quotidian eateries and affordable papa and mama shops.

3. *Fighting Neoliberal Gerontocracy and Mainlandization: Getting Real?*

Amidst this duress, Hong Kong cultural politics have taken a decisive turn, especially in the hands of post-1980s and post-1990s youth. Their defense against high-handed neoliberal and national transformation of the local is to collectively take stock of what really matters and affirm with each other their commitment to a shared future, like Arab youths and post-World War II third and fourth generations elsewhere. Hong Kong recorded increasing numbers of protests and demonstrations, 7,529 incidents in 2012 alone (Lin 2013), with much about defending

what is imagined as Hong Kong culture, way of life and core values. Hong Kong is now a city of protests.

Recent social movements demonstrate public distancing from the Beijing–Hong Kong ruling elite’s vision of Hong Kong–China integration, which is negatively perceived as a form of mainlandization. In 2012, over 120 thousand people joined the anti-national education demonstration led by the post-90s high-school student group Scholarism. This is the largest local student movement since the 1960s, and strikingly, is overwhelmingly supported by parents, teachers, and the public. It succeeded in revoking the national education curriculum reform, perceived by most Hong Kong people as Beijing’s attempt to indoctrinate Hong Kong kids in party-line worldviews.

What is happening to Hong Kong is far from what Shu-mei Shih characterized as the “large-scale, state-sponsored migration and settlement” of the dominant Chinese into “Tibet, Xinjiang ... through a process of continental colonialism that takes the form of settler-cum-internal colonialism” (Shih 2013: 4). However, whether xenophobia against China can be prevented while breathing space can still be had for Hong Kong culture and politics, and how the asymmetrical China and Hong Kong markets can be juggled are real problems that Hong Kong must confront. It can no longer afford to navigate daily life without some vertical reference to mainlandization.

Take Two: *Cold War* (2012) – Generational Warfare and Quotidian Hong Kong–China Identification

If *Rigor Mortis* is the grassroots, get-real perspective directed by a rich guy, then *Cold War* is the middle-class wishful-thinking perspective directed by grassroots directors. While the younger generations all got killed by the elders in the former, they win the generational “Cold War” in the latter.

The multiple winner at HKFA 2013, *Cold War* is the directorial debut of SAR New Wave directors Longman Leung and Sunny Luk.¹² It dramatizes succession power struggle and anxieties about the neoliberalization and mainlandization of Hong Kong core values. “Cold War” in the film is the code for a police operation to rescue hostages of a hijack in which an armed police van carrying advanced equipment and highly skilled officers has disappeared. The hijackers have intimate knowledge of police procedures and are steps ahead of the game. The police must comply with a list of demands to ensure hostage release. With the Police Commissioner stepping down soon, rivals for the post, young Deputy Commissioner (Management) Sean Lau (Aaron Kwok) and old fox Deputy Commissioner (Operations) Waise Lee (Tony Leung Ka-fai) fight to take charge of the operation. Whoever succeeds gets the top job.

Lau wants to negotiate with the hijackers while covertly tracking them down, and has elite support from the Secretary for Security (Andy Lau). He represents

the Rule of Law, professionalism, due procedure, sophisticated research and technology, elitism; core values of the Hong Kong middle class, refined and brainy *wen* masculinity. Lee, on the contrary, represents the older generation's Rule by Personal Command, placing force of character, charisma, personal loyalty ahead of morality and the law. He wants to win by hook or by crook and believes in streetwise combat logic, ends justifying means. He perpetrates a system of practices open to abuse of power and corruption. He rose through the ranks, has the support of rank and file officers, and represents a more grassroots, *jianghu wu* (martial arts) masculinity. Hong Kong and China audiences would find him a semblance of mainland Chinese officials. Thus, he embodies the worry about mainlandization of local governance: the intensification of systemic corruption and decay in post-1997 Hong Kong.

Beneath regular cop motifs is an unusual political recognition about the threat of mainlandization and neoliberalization on the Hong Kong way of life. The gist of the film is its reference to the worsening reality in Hong Kong. Together with Johnnie To's *Life Without Principle* (2011), *Cold War* portrays Hong Kong's political-economy affected by extended neoliberal deregulation. As a result, one of the last vestiges of Hong Kong pride, its clean and transparent business environment and governance that people hold onto as Hong Kong's defining core value, has been eroded from within and irreparably tainted. There is no transnational crime cartel to crack, nor the usual shoot-outs and special effects. The focus is on the mind-game, the gradual and uncanny revelation about the internal, structural decay and systemic injustice within the police force itself. The mastermind behind the hijack is an ex-police officer, resentful of being unjustly fired, taking revenge on his bosses and the corrupt system.

This echoes not only usual news from China but also the actual re-emergence of institutional and corporate elite corruption, bribery, graft, unbridled misconduct and excesses in Hong Kong. In 2013, the ex-commissioner of the Hong Kong Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) is himself being investigated by the ICAC. He spent public money extravagantly on gifts and feasting for mainland Chinese officials and was appointed after retirement as a delegate to the Chinese People's Political Consultative Committee. Allegations over graft, collusion with corrupt Chinese officialdom, and compromise of the Hong Kong intelligence and anti-corruption system shook the confidence of the Hong Kong public to the core. Did he get his mainland appointment due to his willingness to provide intelligence on Hong Kong people to the draconian Chinese security maintenance system? Did he compromise investigation of corruption in Hong Kong involving mainland VIPs? The ex-Chief Executive Donald Tsang, his second ranking man Rafael Hui, the billionaire Kwok brothers, and a slate of officials appointed by the new Chief Executive are all under investigation for graft and bribery.

Crowning the younger, upright Lau, the representative of the rule of law, as the succeeding Commissioner, winning over the baby-boomer Lee's dubious practices, the film implies the need for Hong Kong law and order to be passed onto

worthy hands. The wishful ending in which Lee puts his own son into the hands of the law for the abuse of systemic failures speaks to the psychological need of the Hong Kong citizenry to reaffirm clean governance and the rule of law as Hong Kong core values. Through casting, the son of Commissioner Lee is a figure alluding to the sophisticated, well groomed but nonetheless corrupt and abusive princelings now ruling over China. Having such a figure being busted by Lau, a home grown talent with high moral integrity, comforts audience anxiety about the worst type of mainlandization: the Hong Kong governing and business environment operating more and more like the corrupt conditions of China. Interestingly, the mainland audience also identifies strongly with the issues portrayed and celebrates the film's lucky escape from the clutches of censorship.

Take Three: Conclusion by way of *The Grandmaster* (2013) – Succession Planning, Letting Go and Winning Back the World

We end with a film that poses questions back to ways in which the two SAR New Wave films imagine Hong Kong anxieties. It is a contemplation on the anxiety of Hong Kong cinema by a director whose long silence exemplifies it. As a part of this cinema of anxiety, this film emerges out of the tunnel by letting go some of the anxious symptoms.

Wong Kar-wai is a master among the Hong Kong New Wave / Second Wave, a group who belong to the baby-boomer generation, coming of age during Hong Kong's transition to Chinese sovereignty. They made their marks while riding the economic high tide of the 1980s and 90s and continue to dominate Hong Kong Film Awards (HKFA)¹³ during the economic low tide. Despite individual efforts to nurture young talents, as a cohort, they find it difficult to let go of their baby-boomer narcissism, give way to younger talents, gracefully step back and be the judging panel. The gerontocratic vampire metaphor is not without validity in this patriarchal industry. The real turning point was HKFA 2011, when SAR New Wave directors Derek Kwok and Clement Cheng won best film with *Gallants* (2010). The trend seems to be confirmed when *Cold War* (2012), Longman Leung and Sunny Luk's directorial debut garnered best film, director, screenplay, film score, and visual effects at the HKFA 2013. But then Wong Kar-wai returned to devour twelve wins in HKFA 2014, despite the ironic fact that *The Grandmaster* (2013) is a rare baby-boomer statement that foregrounds the urgency of succession planning.

The Grandmaster is about the solemn responsibility of a whole generation of *kung fu* masters, and implicitly film masters, to pass on the tradition. The film represents *kung fu* as a national tradition that has survived a century of historical traumas through taking root in Hong Kong and the global Chinese diaspora. The "youngest" among existing *kung fu* masters Wong interviewed for the film are like most Hong Kong New Wave / Second Wave filmmakers. They have survived the Communist era and are now in their fifties and sixties, anxiously planning succession.

One thesis of *The Grandmaster* is the three stages of realization when mastering an art, whether martial arts or film-making, and by implication life. The first stage merely “sees oneself” (見自己) (Wong K.W. 2013: 45). One is obsessed with one’s skills, achievements, status. Such works regress to a narcissistic, nostalgic, exclusivist, essentialist obsession with itself. Such films are defensive and limiting.

The second stage “sees heaven and earth” (見天地) (ibid.), and by implication, the conditions of the world. This is when art confronts survival against brutal reality and stark material conditions. This alludes to Hong Kong filmmakers concerned about survival vis-à-vis the global and China markets. Such filmmakers might succeed financially, but might not be able to transcend and break through paradigms in ways worthy of the grandmaster title. Such works are important for the survival of *kung fu* or film, but they might not survive the ultimate test of time.

The third and final stage “sees humanity / the multitude / bare life” (見衆生). Only through the compassionate, expansive, humbling recognition of humanity can one truly bring a culture, an art, a community through the trials and trepidations of modern and contemporary history, and pass it on across time and space, with dignity and grounded equanimity. Such is the responsibility of a grandmaster of martial arts or of film, like Ip Man (master of Wing Chun, a Cantonese native of Foshan) and Wong Kar-wai. Wong’s film is inspired by the fact that Ip, three days before his death, asked his son to film him doing his martial arts. The moment of vulnerable pause in Ip’s demonstration tells of a master trying “to return all one has learned from life to humanity” unto his last breath (Wong K.W. 2013: 45, 41). Ultimately, the recognition of mastery is not in the totalizing command of the world and the universalizing incorporation of heaven and earth, but in the humble realization of finitude in life, culture, and art.

The second thesis of the film concerns older grandmaster Gong of the Northern tradition saying, “if the old never let go, when will the young get their chance?” The young Ip Man of the Southern tradition won over him and become the next grandmaster not due to invincible skill, but due to his ability to see beyond the narrow essentialist North–South binary impasse towards the survival of the culture and world of martial arts at large. Ip was able to take the traumatized *kung fu* community into the future through persistence in compassionate and dignified teaching, despite adversities. Indeed, the heights of Chinese *kung fu* and Chinese film were achieved amidst the turmoil of colonialisms, wars, and revolutions.

The third thesis is embedded in Wong’s foregrounding of his decade-long quest for global knowledge about *kung fu* (Wong K.W. 2013). Our earlier reading about calculative promotional strategies does not preclude another level of cultural politics. Wong, like Ip Man, also humbly recognizes the finitude of a film or *kung fu* master against the inexhaustible and expansive history and culture of martial arts. The global talking point of this film is Wong’s inability to produce a satisfying final cut, and how much significant footage he left out in every version. In the anxious, procrastinatory process of preparing and making this film, Wong has come to reconcile with the fact that one can never present the world a full picture of a

culture. He lets go of making a much longer directorial cut, as any length cannot totalize a culture and an art. He has come to realize the vastness and fragility of the global Sinophone worlds of film and *kung fu*, against which he sees the place of Hong Kong.

The way to overcome the anxiety of competition and cultural survival among Hong Kong, Chinese, and other Sinophone cinemas is, Wong demonstrates, not to limit one's cultural access and entitlement to any categories, be it the local, national, diasporic, transnational or hybrid, but to recognize the fact that one is entitled to what one makes an earnest effort to learn; to recognize the fact that through painstaking devotion to the art and craft of filmmaking, one can in fact give voice to a whole generation of global Sinophone *kung fu* history, without forgetting the humility of film's finitude. One will never be able to exhaust and totalize a culture. What one can master is merely courage and daring to pose the challenge of a cultural and cinematic statement so definitive that other filmmakers find it hard to transcend.

But do SAR New Wave filmmakers just starting out have the resources and conditions to play the game like Wong the grandmaster? Yet Wong seems to imply through portraying Ip Man in his youth that all mastery need to prove its worth by starting from scratch, and by persistently overcoming difficult transitions in the best and worst of times; that all one can take charge of is the verve to invent a paradigm, carve out a niche, blast into a field, and venture out into the open as unprotected bare life. And by implication, Hong Kong film and culture must see beyond the impasses of colonial, national binarisms, go beyond the imagination of mere survival in the gaps of coloniality and global givens, and overcome the fatalism and self-denigration of inferiority complexes and defensive chauvinisms, to see the self and others just as they are.

All in all, the three films demonstrate how the post 1997 Hong Kong SAR Cinema of Anxiety is about anxiety, but not necessarily stuck with anxiety. It is exactly by staging, framing, and cutting into the real of anxiety that it is able to turn around and move on.

Notes

- 1 We thank the Hong Kong Research Grants Council for funding this research. Hong Kong SAR refers to the "Hong Kong Special Administration Region" of China.
- 2 The baby-boomer generation calls their Hong Kong can-do-ism the Lion Rock Spirit.
- 3 "Our market used to be 20 per cent Korea, 40 per cent Taiwan, the seven million people in Malaysia is a steady base, Singapore too. Now Taiwan does not watch Hong Kong films anymore." "The other markets are all dwindling, except Malaysia" (Interview 1).
- 4 Hong Kong film production peaked in the early 1990s, producing over 200 feature films annually, employing over 15,000 people and taking up 79 percent of the gross local market. After a frenzy of "hyperproduction" to cash in before 1997 it declined steeply. Overseas

- revenue fell 85 percent between 1992 and 1998. Local market share plummeted to 25 percent in 2008. Only 50 local films were released in 2007 (Szeto and Chen 2011: 239–40). “A third of our labor were cut off!” Peter Chan exclaimed (Interview 1, 2008).
- 5 Foreign films face a quota of 20 films per year (with an added 14 enhanced-format films since 2012) while Hong Kong films face no quota; foreign films pay a 5 percent import tax and get a lower 25 percent box-office share (up from 13 percent since 2012), while Hong Kong-China co-productions, regarded as local, enjoy a 30–40 percent box-office share and waiver of import tax; only Hong Kong companies are permitted to establish wholly owned film distribution companies in China (*Daily Telegraph* 2012; Szeto and Chen 2011: 244–245).
 - 6 Tarantino’s *Django Unchained* (2012) got sacked despite consent to its “bowdlerization.” A film about an “oppressive and wantonly violent authority” indifferent to minority rights struck too raw a nerve (Brody 2013).
 - 7 When Fruit Chan, Simon Yam, and Li Chi-ngai directed *Tales from the Dark Part 1* (2013), adapting ghost stories by Lilian Lee, they were cheered by Hong Kong netizens for sacrificing the China market for loyalty to local culture and politics (*Apple Daily* 2013). Juno Mak’s *Rigor Mortis* (2013) was also not intended to screen in mainland China, according to the director.
 - 8 Peter Chan concurs with others that mainlandization is true not only for Hong Kong but for all of Asia: “Pan-Asian films will eventually gravitate to China... and Chinese tastes. ...China has enough money ... talent and ... people ... the ‘mainlandization’ imperative is very hard to resist” (Chan 2008).
 - 9 Box-office figures are derived from *Box Office Mojo* and local sources like the Hong Kong Film Archive database and Wikipedia China.
 - 10 In a 2011 poll, 76 per cent Hong Kong people think that “disparity between the rich and the poor” is severe. *Mingpao*, <http://news.mingpao.com/20111202/goh4.htm>. Accessed 2 December 2011.
 - 11 This reckoning was reinforced by the translation of Alice Poon’s *Land and the Ruling Class in Hong Kong* into the Chinese bestseller entitled *Dichan baquan*: “real-estate hegemony” (Poon 2005, 2010).
 - 12 They joined the industry long ago, Leung since 1996 and Luk since 1992, when Hong Kong film started its decline, and, thus, their wait for a directorial debut took much longer.
 - 13 Peter Chan and Raymond Yip’s *Warlords* (2007) won best film and director in HKFA 2008. *Bodyguards and Assassins* (Teddy Chan, 2009) got the same in 2010. Ann Hui’s *The Way We Are* (2008) dominated HKFA 2009 and *A Simple Life* (2011) dominated HKFA 2012.

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Commentary

Dimensions of Hong Kong Cinema

Sheldon Lu

On the eve of Hong Kong's return to the sovereignty of the People's Republic of China, I ruminated about the dimensions, types, paradigms, and functions of varieties of Chinese cinemas, especially Hong Kong cinema from 1949 to that historic moment. I wrote the following:

In the case of the mainland and Taiwan (Republic of China), we may speak of two competing Chinese "national" cinemas as a function of the Chinese nation-state; in the case of Hong Kong and Taiwan again (as a Chinese "province"), what we see is the flourishing of local Chinese cinemas, often spoken in dialects (Cantonese, Fukienese); the popularity of Chinese films, especially Hong Kong action films, in Southeast Asia and East Asia also creates a regional Chinese cinema; finally, the spread of Chinese films across the entire world makes Chinese cinema a global cinema. In the late 1980s and the 1990s, at the end of the twentieth century, new patterns of international co-production and global distribution render the idea of national cinema rather problematic. The study of *national* cinemas must then transform into *transnational* film studies (Lu 1997: 25).

I pinpointed several modes of existence for Hong Kong cinema: national cinema, local cinema, regional cinema, and global cinema. Moreover, the various levels of Hong Kong cinema can be fruitfully examined in the critical framework of transnational cinema studies. Many years have passed since Hong Kong's handover to China and the publication of the anthology *Transnational Chinese Cinemas*, both in 1997. Although the general contours of Hong Kong cinema as enumerated at that time still apply to the present condition, the perimeters of our analysis can be broadened and enriched. The critical framework of transnational Chinese cinema studies has also been debated about, re-examined, and supplemented in film studies circles since then. The transnational approach is still one of the most useful and apt ways of describing contemporary Hong Kong cinema, and surely it can be further fine-tuned and expanded.

Based on the illuminating chapters written by the authors of this section of the volume, as well as my own previous thinking, I would propose the following paradigms to describe the nature of Hong Kong cinema since 1997.

The basic dimensions are still the same: national, local, regional, and global. But we could use new terms: mainlandization, or nationalization; localization, indigenization, or Hong Kongization; regionalization, or Asianization; and globalization.

Needless to say, Hong Kong's economy, culture, and society have moved closer to the mainland in many ways as it has officially become a Special Administrative Region (SAR) of China. Moreover, with the signing of the Close Economic Partnership Arrangement (CEPA) by Hong Kong and China in 2003, it has been more lucrative for the Hong Kong film industry to make co-produced films with the mainland. China gives preferential treatment to Hong Kong film companies that invest and produce in China. Hence, mainlandization has become an inevitable trend. The film market in China has undergone phenomenal growth and now stands as the second largest market in the world. How could one not take advantage of this vast market? Famed Hong Kong filmmakers have seized on this opportunity to co-produce films with China. Suffice to mention such best-selling films as *Red Cliff* (John Woo, 2008), *Ip Man* (Winston Ip, starring Donnie Yen, 2008), *Confucius* (Hu Mei, starring Chow Yun-fat, 2010), *American Dreams in China* (Peter Chan, 2013), *Journey to the West: Conquering the Demons* (Stephen Chow and Derek Kwok, 2013). These quintessentially Hong Kong filmmakers have obtained a new lease of life by venturing into the huge Chinese market. As the ex-colony rejoins the nation-state, Hong Kong cinema nationalizes itself and participates in Chinese national cinema. World-famous for his casting as the classic Hong Kong gangster hero, Chow Yun-fat portrays in a mainland production the most revered Chinese personality of all time: Confucius. Peter Chan's transformation is equally noteworthy. He is the director of *Comrades, Almost a Love Story* (1996), by now a classic from the handover period, a film that so touchingly details the drama, love, and aspirations of Chinese-turned-Hong Kongers. Yet, in the second decade of the twenty-first century, he directs a mainland story set in Beijing: *American Dreams in China*. He has transformed from an indigenous Hong Kong director into an adept Chinese director.

If nationalization and mainlandization are the order of the day, Hong Kong cinema's self-identity might be de-stabilized. Akbar Abbas famously theorized about the culture of "disappearance" on the eve of Hong Kong's handover to China (Abbas 1997). The anxiety of disappearance still looms large today. In response to this precarious situation, Esther Cheung astutely observes the importance of a "crisis cinema" in contemporary Hong Kong. Topophilia, or a place-bound urban cinema has consolidated itself at the same time against the uniformity and anonymity of postmodern globalized space. It is a cinema of affect, of personal attachment to the place. Fruit Chan's "1997 Trilogy" films are good early examples of this. I would particularly mention Ann Hui's *A Simple Life* (*Sister Peach*, 2011) as a further testimony to a sense of the emotional attachment to the local culture, tradition, history of Hong Kong. The film describes an old-fashioned mode of life that is literally disappearing from Hong Kong. Precisely due to its indigenization or

re-Hong Kongization, the film captures the attention and praise of international film communities. Hong Kong cinema stubbornly persists as a local cinema.

For a long time, Hong Kong cinema has been a powerful regional cinema in East Asia and Southeast Asia. Its genre films (action, martial arts, comedy, period drama, family drama) have been watched and savored by generations of audiences throughout the region. It has offered a steady diet of entertainment that the Chinese-language films from China and Taiwan could not provide.

After failed earlier attempts, Hong Kong cinema finally crossed over to mainstream international film culture beginning in the mid-1990s. Hong Kong cinema also thrives as a global cinema. John Woo, Jackie Chan, Jet Li, Johnnie To, Stephen Chow, and other directors have in their own ways transformed Hong Kong's indigenous film genres into global film genres (action, martial arts, comedy). Wong Kar-wai has emerged as a unique art-house director hailing from Hong Kong. A host of actors and actresses such as Chow Yun-fat, Donnie Yen, Tony Leung Chiu-wai, Andy Lau, Maggie Cheung, and Michelle Yeoh are internationally recognized film personages with numerous fans. Hong Kong film styles, themes, and action choreography have in turn influenced and provided inspiration to filmmakers from elsewhere, as evidenced in such mainstream Hollywood films as *The Matrix Trilogy* (Wachowski Brothers, 1999–2003), *Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle* (Joseph McGinty Nichol, 2003), *The Departed* (Martin Scorsese, 2006), and *Kill Bill 1 & 2* (Quentin Tarantino, 2003–2004).

The prominence of Hong Kong cinema as at once a national, local, regional, and global cinema has entailed reorientations in cinema studies. As opposed to the model of national cinema, the transnational model and the "Chinese-language film" model have emerged to account for the dynamic interflow within the Greater China area: China, Taiwan, Hong Kong (Lu 2012). Co-production within Greater China has become increasingly widespread since the early 1990s. As mentioned earlier, a group of scholars have theorized the transnational turn in Chinese film studies. The transnational paradigm has been further embellished since its first introduction (Lu 2005; Berry 2011). Hong Kong itself has never been a nation-state; it is located on the margins of geopolitical entities such as China, Taiwan, Great Britain, and the US. The model of national cinema could not adequately explain its modality of existence. Hence, Hong Kong cinema is a transnational cinema *par excellence*. The transnational is not merely a two-way traffic from one nation to another nation. It could be also translocal and polylocal (Zhang 2010), subnational and supranational. Nor is transnational cinema a handmaid of transnational capitalism; rather, it could be a liberating force breaking out of the narrow confines of the nation-state.

The paradigm of Chinese-language cinema (*huayu dianying*) was first proposed by film scholars from Taiwan and Hong Kong in the early 1990s. Fearful of a possible de-Sinification tendency, mainland Chinese scholars were initially hesitant in embracing this paradigm. However, nowadays mainland-based Chinese film scholars are the most enthusiastic proponents of the paradigm of Chinese-language cinema in the united front of Greater China film studies. They regularly hold

international conferences and edit book series on such topic. The cultural form from a borderland – Hong Kong – has in turn exerted a powerful influence on the Central Plains and has changed the terms of academic discourse.

“Sinophone” is another influential discourse to rename and redescribe the cultural politics of Chinese-speaking communities throughout the world. But in one prominent definition of the term, the Sinophone does not include the Mandarin-speaking (Hanyu) people and regions of China, and ideologically functions as a counter-hegemonic force against China-centrism. Such a stand-offish relationship between the Sinophone and China does not accurately demarcate the interactions between Hong Kong and China since 1997. Thus, this particular paradigm defined as such has limited applicability in regard to the cultural productions of Hong Kong. As mentioned, mainlandization in the post-1997 era is so evident that it is impossible to wish away this trend. Even in a heart-warming film such as *A Simple Life* that celebrates the local life of Hong Kong, the presence of China cannot be elided. The protagonist Roger (Andy Lau) is a film producer and must travel to China frequently. There is a scene set in China where heavyweight Hong Kong filmmakers such as Sammo Hung, Tsui Hark, and Andy Lau sat to discuss issues of film co-production with a mainland company. Mainland director Ning Hao also makes a cameo appearance in a scene set in Hong Kong. Mainland Chinese actress Qin Hailu, who achieved popularity after debuting in Fruit Chan’s Hong Kong film *Durian Durian* (2000), plays an important role in *A Simple Life*.

The transnational, even understood in the most literal sense of border-crossing between locales, regions, and nations, finds its exemplary articulation in Hong Kong cinema. The productive synergies of Hong Kong cinema are further accelerated in a “borderless world” in the age of globalization (Yau 2001). It should be also be added that the paradigm of Chinese-language cinema, encompassing film production and circulation beyond the limitation and teleology of the modern Chinese nation-state, is also an apt discourse to speak about the rich and diverse cinematic tradition of Hong Kong.

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Part II

Critical Geographies

Hong Kong Cinema's Exotic Others

Re-examining the Hong Kong Body in the Context of Asian Regionalism

Olivia Khoo

Introduction

From international art films to the mass appeal of martial arts cinema, the global popularity of Hong Kong films has depended on the cinema's ability to present an image that is both familiar and enticingly new. As one of the cinema's most visible signs, the body has come to articulate Hong Kong cinema's complex negotiations between competing historical and cultural influences over time. From the muscular display of action stars like Bruce Lee to the fashioning of femininity in the cheongsam worn by actresses such as Maggie Cheung in *In the Mood for Love* (Wong Kar-wai, 2000), the physical and performative transformations of the cinematic body have been examined from multiple perspectives in the academic scholarship on Hong Kong cinema: in terms of the re-signification of national identity (Lo 1996), in relation to transnational inscriptions of gender and sexuality (Berry 2006), and as a site of cross-cultural education (Morris 2001), to give just a few examples. While most of the critical discussion has taken place in the context of martial arts or action cinema, the representation of the body in Hong Kong's other commercial genres and in its art cinema has also been considered (Khoo 2006; Srinivas 2011). This chapter explores changing representations of the Hong Kong body across three different genres – action, drama, and comedy – to ask what is unique about Hong Kong's cinematic rendering of the body in each of these contexts within post-1997 cinema.

Delineating the boundaries of Hong Kong's cinematic uniqueness – its “identity” – took on particular historical significance in the period surrounding

the handover to China in 1997. In his seminal discussion of the “disappearance” of Hong Kong cinema and culture in the lead up to the handover, Ackbar Abbas suggested that the possibility of a new Hong Kong subjectivity after 1997 would be predicated on a “process of negotiating the mutations and permutations of colonialism, nationalism, and capitalism” that would create a “subjectivity that is coaxed into being by the disappearance of old cultural bearings and orientations” (Abbas 1997: 11). With the return to China featuring as the dominant political and cultural event of that period, filmmakers and critics looked for ways of expressing and understanding post-handover subjectivity in Hong Kong cinema in the first instance through a negotiation with on-screen mainland Chinese characters. Allegorical readings have been predominant in analyses of such films. Li-Mei Chang (2009: 172), for example, shows how Fruit Chan’s *Durian Durian* (2000) and *Hollywood Hong Kong* (2001) employ “the mainland prostitute as the central character to forge a link between Hong Kong and China to reflect on the psycho-social dynamics between the two societies after the reunification.” Such allegorical readings highlight how the formation of an on-screen identity post-handover has been played out on the body, in Chang’s example, through the objectification of the mainland Chinese female body in order to derive a sense of “local” identity from the “otherness” of the mainland Chinese.

Fifteen years on from the handover new cultural and industrial transformations have assumed significance. Concurrent with the important commentary that continues on the transformations of the Hong Kong film industry after reunification with China (Pang 2007; Teo 2008; Chang 2009; Lee 2009; Szeto and Chen 2012), some of the most energizing scholarship on Hong Kong cinema post-1997 has sought to move beyond the Hong Kong–China double bind to consider new contexts for filmmaking in Hong Kong outside of a transnational Chinese framework, to discover precisely how and where to locate these new cultural bearings and orientations that Ackbar Abbas presaged. This chapter contributes to this line of enquiry by considering Hong Kong cinema and in particular representations of the Hong Kong body in relation to a burgeoning Asian regionalism. Hong Kong’s “local” identity is finding new avenues of expression into the early 2000s through its appearance into other spaces in Asia. Following Pang Lai-kwan’s observation that “local Hong Kong becomes most concrete when Hong Kong becomes most transnational and dispersed” (Pang 2007: 413), another perspective on the transnationalization and dispersal of local Hong Kong identity is through the cinema’s active participation in a regional conceptualization of Asia. The chapter will explore inter-Asian connections in Hong Kong cinema, examining in particular how the (dis)placement of Hong Kong bodies into other “exotic” Asian locations has reconfigured the representation of this body as it has been characterized in existing scholarship on Hong Kong cinema.

Regionalizing Hong Kong Cinema

With its small domestic market, Hong Kong cinema has long relied on Southeast and East Asian markets (most recently China) for its audience.¹ In recent years, however, the success of locally produced films in these traditional markets, most notably in South Korea, Thailand, Taiwan, Singapore, and Malaysia, has led to shrinking audience shares for Hong Kong films. This decline in Hong Kong's regional audiences has been accompanied by a shift in industrial strategy towards greater regional collaboration between Asia's film industries. Although active exchanges have long taken place between film industries in Asia, Asian cinema is entering a new period of regional consolidation and co-operation marked by new models of production, film financing, exhibition, and reception that emerged with the development of Asian modernities and economies in the late 1980s. The development of Asia as a regional construction rapidly gained pace from the 1990s as a result of the economic rise of East Asia and was again compelled by the collapse of key markets during the Asian financial crisis of 1997. Triumphalist notions of Asia aside, regionalization has become an increasing necessity not only for smaller national industries, but also the larger production centers in the struggle to compete with Hollywood. Pan-Asian collaborations, employing stars, crew, and funding from across the region, have been utilized in films such as *The Myth* (Stanley Tong, 2005) and *The Promise* (Chen Kaige, 2005). However, early optimism towards pan-Asian success in the cinema has not been fully realized. With the exception of a few blockbuster films, pan-Asian collaborations have yet to achieve notable success on a wider scale, and as Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh (2010) has suggested, the strategy has been "deferred" in favor of more profitable subregional filmmaking initiatives, including transnational Chinese productions.

Nevertheless, Hong Kong film production since reunification with China has been modest, with only 50 films produced in 2005 and 51 in 2006, although the number has almost doubled in 2014. As Stephen Teo (2008) notes, the mainland Chinese market remains to a large extent unrealized and unfulfilled. This chapter will examine three films made during the years of low production in the first decade of 2000 to consider how strategies of regionalization for the survival and rejuvenation of the Hong Kong film industry have left their mark on the representation of the Hong Kong body. These films, *Shinjuku Incident* (Derek Yee Tung-sing, 2009), *After This Our Exile* (Patrick Tam Kar-ming, 2006), and *Himalaya Singh* (Wai Ka-fai, 2005) are not pan-Asian blockbusters, nor are they simply "transnational Chinese" films since they all involve a collaboration with non-Chinese talent, crew, or funding. Rather, they locate and imagine a complex, heterogeneous Asia through a range of industrial and representational tactics.

Hong Kong cinema's long history of engagement with other spaces in Asia can be seen in the extensive range of films that invoke, imagine, or displace Hong Kong stories and bodies into other settings in Asia, or that bring "other" Asian bodies

to Hong Kong. Notable films made in the years prior to 1997 dealing with contemporary issues of migration, displacement and exile include Ann Hui's Vietnam trilogy (*Boy From Vietnam* [1978], *The Story of Woo Viet* [1981] and *Boat People* [1982]), and her later *Song of the Exile* (1990), and Clara Law's *Autumn Moon* (1992). In the decade post-1997, Hong Kong cinema's imagining of a more porous Asia is represented in films including Derek Yee's Hong Kong–Singapore co-production, *The Truth About Jane and Sam* (1999), starring Singaporean actress Fann Wong and Taiwanese actor / singer Peter Ho Yun-Tung in a love story about a young journalist named Sam from Singapore who meets a girl from the mainland, Jane, in Hong Kong; Wong Kar-wai's *In the Mood for Love* (2000), which focuses on the lives and affairs of a Shanghaiese community living in Hong Kong during the 1960s, but also incorporates on- and off-screen spaces in Cambodia, Singapore, and Japan; Alan Mak Siu-fai and Felix Chong Man-keung's *Moonlight in Tokyo* (2005), starring Leon Lai as the mentally-challenged Jun who is stranded in Tokyo and forced to make money masking as a "Korean" gigolo; Jingle Ma's *Seoul Raiders* (2005), an action-comedy starring Tony Leung Chiu-wai as a special agent sent to uncover criminal activities in Seoul, South Korea; and Stanley Tong's *The Myth* (2005), a historical drama shifting between modern day Hong Kong, Qin dynasty China, and Dhaka, India. Other films exploring the introduction of "foreign" characters to Hong Kong include the Pang Brothers' early success *Bangkok Dangerous* (Danny Pang and Oxide Pang, 1999), which features a brief segment with the protagonist, a Thai hit man, employed to carry out a murder in Hong Kong; Christopher Doyle's *Away with Words* (1999), starring Tadanobu Asano as a Japanese man visiting Hong Kong; and Yonfan's *Color Blossoms* (2004), set in contemporary Hong Kong but featuring a cast and crew from Japan, Korea, and India.

This list of films is by no means comprehensive, nor does it detail the complex and sometimes uneven movements of talent, financing, and distribution between and across Asia throughout the history of contemporary Hong Kong cinema. As a brief snapshot, the examples collectively underscore the impact of processes of regionalization on Hong Kong cinema in both popular and art house cinema, and across a range of genres over the last 20–30 years. These are not just stories that employ the Asian "Other" to understand the Hong Kong self; they mark Hong Kong cinema's integration into a cinematic imaginary of a regional Asia, as an object that is itself both familiar and "exotic," recognizable yet new.

Recent approaches to thinking about Asia in regional terms, particularly under the rubric of the inter-Asian cultural studies movement, have been critically attuned to the potential danger of subsuming differences under a regional identity. Chua Beng Huat (2004) and Chen Kuan-Hsing (2010) have both argued for the ability to conceive of a regional identity for Asia: Chua in the form of an imaginary produced through the consumption of popular cultural products from across the region, and Chen through the development of inter-Asian dialogues employing an epistemology of Asia as "method." While there is some concrete basis to Asian regionalization in the form of the movement of capital resulting in economic and

cultural regionalization, the “idea” of Asia is in many ways dependent on a “structure of sentiment” (Chen 2010: 214) or a “feeling” (Iwabuchi 2004). As Chen (2010: 214) argues, “the globalization of capital has generated economic and cultural regionalization, which has in turn brought about the rise of Asia as a pervasive structure of sentiment. As a result, both a historical condition and an emotional basis exist for new imaginings of Asia to emerge.” The “idea” of Asia emerges first as a structure of feeling where the material conditions for building solidarity are not yet fully in place. The first important step is in “imagin[ing] new possibilities” (Chen 2010: 214). It is in this context that it is important to consider the cinema’s investment in affect and its role in forging new imaginings while industrial models and production strategies remain at best tentative or experimental and, at worst, “deferred.” In regards to recent Hong Kong cinema, this relies on thinking beyond Hong Kong cinema’s integration with China to consider its broader relationships with other filmmaking partners in the region. This chapter posits that the Hong Kong body in recent cinema is not (as is dominantly theorized) again in crisis as a disappearing or spectral body, but is a body redefining itself in relation to new regional imperatives of culture, economics, and politics.

The three films that will be considered can be located within the genres of action / action blockbuster (*Shinjuku Incident*), drama / art house (*After This Our Exile*), and comedy (*Himalaya Singh*). In each of these examples, Hong Kong cinema’s identity within a broader regional construction of Asia has been reconfigured on the site of the body; as a fractured body (in the action genre), an exiled body (in the drama / art genre), and a transformative or transcendent body (in the comedy genre). Through the specificity of genre, these representations provide multiple and overlapping perspectives on how the body in recent Hong Kong cinema has been placed within a regional imaginary of Asia. The fractured, exiled, and transformative / transcendent bodies of recent Hong Kong cinema are not “separate” bodies but in tandem produce a complex picture of how Hong Kong cinema’s shifting critical and cultural geographies have impacted on the body; nevertheless, as heuristic and representational categories they enable us to examine specific machinations of performance, race, and technology as they operate within the confines of generic boundaries. Post-1997 Hong Kong cinema is, in these examples, relocated to exoticized settings in Japan, Malaysia, and India, with this exoticism written on the body. The *re-corporealization* of the body through Asian exoticism (as opposed to its disappearance) provides another avenue of renewal for contemporary Hong Kong cinema.

Fractured bodies: *Shinjuku Incident* (Derek Yee, 2009)

As one of Hong Kong’s most iconic film stars, Jackie Chan has held a reputation spanning over three decades for producing action cinema that combines seemingly effortless stunt work with physical comedy and slapstick humor. Now aged

sixty, Chan's film roles in the last decade have diversified, and although he still performs in action and martial arts films, he has also taken on less physically demanding roles in films with a greater dramatic component. In *The Myth* Chan plays two roles – one as a present-day archaeologist in Hong Kong and the other as a Qin Dynasty warrior who falls in love with a Korean princess he is tasked to protect; in *The Karate Kid* (Harald Zwart, 2010) Chan plays Mr. Han, a Chinese *kung fu* master with a tragic past (reprising the role initially played by Japanese actor Pat Morita in the 1984 original); and in *1911* (2011), a film which Chan co-directed with Zhang Li, Chan plays Huang Xing, the first army commander-in-chief of the Republic of China. Coinciding with Chan's move into dramatic acting is the increasingly nationalistic tenor of the roles he has recently undertaken. In each of the films mentioned, Chan plays a mainland Chinese character whose chivalrous values are upheld in the service of a trenchant Chinese nationalism. In 2009 Chan also had a cameo appearance in the ensemble film *The Founding of a Republic* (directed by Huang Jianxin and Han Sanping). *Shinjuku Incident*, also released in 2009, again has Chan playing a mainland Chinese character, this time a tractor mechanic from rural Northeast China nicknamed "Steelhead."

Shinjuku Incident opens with a boat load of illegal Chinese immigrants, including Chan's Steelhead, washed up on the shore of Wakasa Bay in Japan. The first, arresting, image of the film is of a mass of desperate bodies on the beach. News reports announce that this is the third boat load of illegal immigrants to arrive in Japan in a few months, sparking fears of an influx of undesirable "foreigners," represented in the film almost exclusively as the Chinese.

A flashback to life in Northeastern China shows Steelhead happily in love with a woman named Xiu Xiu (Xu Jinglei), who expresses a desire to live and work in Japan, like many of their fellow villagers.² In an early expository scene, a group of villagers crowds around a middle-aged Chinese woman, with the camera zooming in to show a close-up of the woman's arm – an unusual shot of an unnamed, unidentified woman's body part so early in the film – revealing a prominent immunization scar. The villagers plot whether they will be able to convince officials that the woman is a Japanese orphan so that a number of them can claim to be her children and therefore travel to Japan legally. One woman explains, "In those days getting cowpox vaccination was a big deal. Only Japanese kids could afford such a luxury..."

The desperation of the Chinese villagers to "become" Japanese is embodied in the character of Xiu Xiu who fails to return from a temporary stay in Japan with her aunt. After repeated calls to his friend Jie (Daniel Wu) who is living in Japan, Steelhead questions, "How can she just vanish?" Xiu Xiu has not in fact "disappeared," as Steelhead fears; she has become "Yuko" and is married to yakuza boss Eguchi (Masaya Kato). Xiu Xiu has undergone a complete transformation in language and dress (when Steelhead re-encounters her she is wearing a traditional white kimono), and has severed all ties with family in China.

Against the desire of the Chinese to assimilate is the blatant racism expressed by several of the Japanese characters towards the Chinese. This racism is articulated, through verbal and physical assaults, towards their bodies. When Steelhead first arrives in Japan, Jie is ordered to take him to a bathhouse because he "stinks." At the sight of two naked Chinese men conversing in Mandarin in the bathhouse, Japanese mobsters express their fury that Japan has "gone to the dogs." The film's discourse of Japanese xenophobia against the Chinese is also evident in the panic expressed by the Japanese over a perceived flood of illegal immigrants entering their shores. The illegal immigrants perform the city's dirty work, cleaning its rubbish tips and sewers. When Japanese citizens complain about the illegal workers, Detective Kitano (Naoto Takenaka) responds, "it's the illegal workers who clean the sewers. A Japanese would never do such a dirty job. If his toilet was blocked shit would just pile up to his ass."

The seemingly straightforward nationalist ideology presented by the film is complicated by the inclusion of "sympathetic" Japanese characters, including Detective Kitano (who can speak basic Mandarin and forms a tentative alliance with Steelhead), and yakuza boss Eguchi, who expresses more tolerance for the Chinese than his subordinates are willing to accept. On the other side of this representational divide, the "Chinese" exist only as an indistinguishable mass, their local / national origins not considered noteworthy or made apparent beyond a superficial use of language. Most of the group of illegal immigrants speak to one another in Mandarin, including Chan's Steelhead and Wu's Jie, but one or two speak and are easily understood by the rest of the group, in Cantonese. The film is directed by Hong Kong veteran Derek Yee and features some of Hong Kong's biggest stars, including Chin Kar-lok, Lam Suet, and Ken Lo Wai-kwong, in addition to Jackie Chan and Daniel Wu, all of whom are rendered generically "Chinese" in the film. Notably, the only Chinese character to be distinguished from the other illegal immigrants is the Taiwanese gang leader Gao, who is affiliated with the yakuza. It is Gao, played by Jack Kao (a Taiwanese actor best known for his roles in several Hou Hsiao-Hsien films), who performs the most brutal acts of violence against the other Chinese. When Jie is accused of tampering with a pachinko machine, Gao orders for Jie's right arm to be sliced off. In retaliation, Steelhead later chops off Gao's arm with a machete.³ The groups repeatedly attack one another, fighting over "territories" that are placed under their control by the yakuza.

It is difficult to resist an allegorical reading of the film when its national politics are so readily foregrounded in representational terms. Group solidarity and allegiance (between the mainland Chinese and the Hong Kong characters) is rewarded, whereas secessionism and betrayal of the group results in brutal consequences. It is the character of Jie, portrayed as the most innocent and naïve of the group, who is continually victimized and scapegoated. This results in Jie's transformation half-way into the film into a ruthless gangster and drug addict (complete with outrageous silver wig and make up, and prosthetic arm which he uses as a weapon).

Steelhead says to him in disgust, “You look like a ghost!” This reference to Jie’s bodily “disappearance” is refracted at the end of the film through Jie’s ultimate re-incorporation. During a final battle between the warring gangs, Steelhead arrives only in time to see Jie die in a gruesome scene of disembowelment. This “externalizing” of Jie’s corporeality, from ghostly / disappearing figure to a fully embodied (albeit fractured) self, provides an arresting image of a body literally “out of place” in Japan.

In a feature in *Time Asia*, “10 Questions for Jackie Chan,” viewers and fans of Jackie Chan were given the opportunity to posit questions to their idol. Christine Susanna Tjhin from Jakarta asked, “What message do you want to send with the movie *Shinjuku Incident*?” Chan responded with the following:

We want to send out a message to our people from China, from Indonesia, from Malaysia: no country is like home. When you’re in Japan, when you’re in America, you’re nobody. I play a nobody in Japan. Somehow all the temptations keep coming and you can’t fight them. If we can send out a message that nobody should escape from a boat illegally to Japan or even Australia or America, that you should just stay where you are, then that’s a good message (“10 Questions” 2009).

This bizarre response, advocating a policing of national borders (and bodies), suggests that “home” for “our people” in Asia is anywhere but in “Western” countries like Australia and the US. Yet the fact that Japan is included in this description might lead to an interpretation that “our people” refers only to the Chinese in Asia. Chan’s controversial “homecoming” rhetoric has been reiterated in another regional forum, the Boao Forum for Asia, an economic conference held on Hainan Island on April 18, 2009 entitled “Tapping into Asia’s Creative Industry Potential.” Chan is reported to have commented:

In the ten years after Hong Kong’s return to Chinese rule, I can gradually see, I’m not sure if it’s good to have freedom or not. If you’re too free, you’re like the way Hong Kong is now. It’s very chaotic. Taiwan is also chaotic. I’m gradually beginning to feel that we Chinese need to be controlled.

Chan adds, “If we are not being controlled, we’ll just do what we want” and too much freedom could lead to chaos “like in Taiwan” (Coonan 2009).

Although Chan’s representatives have said that his comments were taken out of context, they have offended Taiwanese and Hong Kong groups, with Taiwan threatening to boycott the release of *Shinjuku Incident*. If the final message of *Shinjuku Incident*, according to the film’s iconic star, is to “just stay where you are,” then through its extreme violence against Japan’s newcomers, the film forecloses the possibility of imagining Asia differently, in more inclusive regional terms. Hong Kong bodies are literally “out of place” in the enticing metropolis of modern-day Tokyo, punished in the act of leaving.

Exiled bodies: *After This Our Exile* (Patrick Tam, 2006)

Whereas in *Shinjuku Incident* bodies, allegiances and identities are fractured when home is strayed too far from, in *After This Our Exile*, a film by another Hong Kong cinema veteran, Patrick Tam Kar-ming, home becomes a structuring absence for bodies in exile. That is, there is no "home" to return to. *After This Our Exile* depicts multiracial Malaysia as almost entirely devoid of non-Chinese bodies. With a cast of pan-Chinese stars – Aaron Kwok and Charlie Yeung from Hong Kong, Kelly Lin from Taiwan, and Qin Hailu from China, the film presents an almost cloistered world of the Chinese in Malaysia, using the breakdown of a family unit to represent the distance between a community of "exiles" in Southeast Asia.

The opening of the film presents an idyllic landscape in the lush Malaysian countryside, which is exoticized in warm hues of green and blue by cinematographer Mark Lee Ping-Bin. A young boy (Gow Ian Iskander), referred to by his parents as "Ah Boy," is riding on the back of his father's bicycle, holding a pinwheel. Suddenly, the boy falls off the bicycle and cries out in pain. Audiences are abruptly shaken out of their reverie as it all turns out to have been a dream and the boy wakes.

It is through this young boy's perspective that the film's narrative unfolds, retaining the almost dreamlike quality of the film's opening. Ah Boy returns home from his school bus one morning to find his mother's bags packed, with her intending to leave her family because she has had enough of her husband's gambling. Ah Boy runs to fetch his father, Sheng (Aaron Kwok), who is working as a cook in a nearby restaurant. A scene ensues outside the family home with the mother Lin (Charlie Yeung) humiliated into returning home in front of all of their neighbors, her clothes and belongings strewn across the street. Lin later orchestrates another opportunity to leave and this time she is successful. The remainder of the film is a portrait of the relationship between father and son (the Chinese title of the film is *Fu zi*, 'Father and Son').⁴ As Sheng's gambling habit continues, Ah Boy is forced to steal to support the two of them. On one occasion, Ah Boy is caught and taken away by the police while his cowardly father hides. When Sheng later visits his son in a juvenile detention center, a violent scene erupts and Ah Boy bites off his father's ear in what Gina Marchetti (2011: 78) has referred to as one of the film's "decisive gesture[s]." Ah Boy literally marks his father's body with his disappointment and rage.

This family drama becomes the site for a questioning of nation and home, public and private, for bodies in exile from one another even in the most intimate of relationships – the nuclear family unit. With the exception of two friends whom the mother confides in, and a prostitute who forms a casual sexual relationship with the father, there are very few external characters of significance in the film besides the three immediate family members. The mother is having an affair with another man but we do not see his face. Public airings of the family's drama are

quickly shut down: from the domestic scene played out on the street at the beginning of the film when Sheng bullies his wife into returning to the house, to an advertisement that Sheng takes out in the local newspaper begging for his wife to return home, which he signs off using a pet name so that his friends won't know he has been left by his wife. Ah Boy, forced to hide in the closet of strangers' homes to avoid getting caught for stealing, finds himself a witness to their private conversations and dramas but is unable to contain his emotions and is revealed when he is found sobbing at one family's personal tragedy. The breakdown between public and private spaces, and of bodies exiled from home, is most poignantly captured in a scene in the mother's new house, where she lives with her new family. Despite the neglect of his father, Ah Boy is unable to feel comfortable in this space, even though his mother implores him to regard this as his own home.

Befitting the film's themes and production context, Esther C.M. Yau (2011) has referred to this film as "exilic" cinema.⁵ The film is New Wave director Tam's return to directing after a 17-year break. As a director, Tam is well known for his films *The Sword* (1980), *Nomad* (1982), and *My Heart is that Eternal Rose* (1989). Tam also worked as an editor on Wong Kar-wai's *Days of Being Wild* (1991) and *Ashes of Time* (1994) and Johnnie To's *Election* (2005). While many of Tam's contemporaries have moved on to make Chinese blockbuster films, Tam continues to create critical, counter-cultural cinema (Cheung, Marchetti and Tan 2011: 82). Tam says in an interview, "I like the idea of 'exile.' Although I am a filmmaker, I don't see myself that closely connected or integrated with the local industry. I seldom go to parties, and I seldom talk with other people. I like to do things by myself. I am more individualistic; I take this loner approach." (Marchetti, Vivier and Podvin 2007). The trope of exile, which runs from the film's title and production context through to its narrative, performance, and aesthetics, correspondingly invokes the loss of home, which becomes a structuring absence in the film's *mise-en-scène*: outside the juvenile detention center, only the bottom section of an advertising billboard is legible, displaying prominently the word "HOME" while foregrounding its physical absence for Ah Boy.

Narrative closure is supplied by the return of Ah Boy after a ten year lapse. Now a young man, Ah Boy returns to the town where he grew up and, at a distance, encounters a man who resembles his father. In voice-over Ah Boy announces that his father now leads a peaceful life and has remarried. Ah Boy also makes peace with the past, returning a watch stolen from a friend's father. However, there is no tearful reunion between Ah Boy and either of his parents. As Tam notes in an interview with Esther C.M. Yau (2011: 90), "[w]here there is exile or abandonment, there is always a 'return.'" However, the film does not provide a return to "home" as a physical or familial structure. Rather, the "return" involves a physical and temporal displacement to exotic Malaysia, which stands in as a nostalgic reminder of "home." Tam says, "I don't deliberately compare Malaysia and Hong Kong, but the outlook or space of the film reminds people of 1960s Hong Kong locations. There may be a nostalgic touch or layer of meaning to it, but this is not

done consciously or deliberately" (Marchetti et al. 2007). Malaysia, exoticized as an earlier or "prior" version of Hong Kong, ironically provides for the cinema's present-day renewal.

Film programmer Roger Garcia has referred to *After This Our Exile* as "the first masterpiece of Hong Kong cinema in the twenty-first century." Andrew Chan (2007) notes that this statement "may have more to do with a current resistance to the 'internationalism' of Hong Kong's art house hits than it does with the actual film" (Chan 2007). Nevertheless, critically recentering the film in local / national terms, albeit through the exoticism of Malaysia, provides for the possibility of another form of "homecoming" for Hong Kong cinema within a regional imaginary of Asia.

In an interview with the director, Gina Marchetti, David Vivier, and Thomas Podvin ask Tam whether he considers *After This Our Exile* to be more of "a Hong Kong film, a Chinese film, or a Malaysian film?" Tam answers, "The film is a collaboration, so you can call it an 'Asian film.' That's more appropriate. People in Hong Kong, mainland China, Taiwan, and Malaysia, all these Chinese in different places, really collaborated on this project. This is really 'Asian' cinema" (Marchetti et al. 2007). Although Tam's statement emphasizes the "Chinese" in Asia, broader regional influences are present throughout the film, for example an advertising bill for a film titled *Pontianak*, which refers to a Malay ghost folklore that has featured as the subject of several Singaporean and Malaysian horror film successes in the region. These are secreted, oblique references to a regional "home" for Hong Kong cinema within Southeast Asia, smuggled into the mise-en-scène by a master auteur of exilic cinema.

Transformative, Transcendent bodies: *Himalaya Singh* (Wai Ka-fai, 2005)

As a New Year comedy, *Himalaya Singh* targets a very different audience to the two dramatic films just discussed. Adding an exotic Indian setting to the New Year film, the body is again foregrounded in this "*mo lei tau*" (nonsense) film. The film's key representation is one of malleable bodies that are able to be transformed (both through performance and through visual special effects), but only in the fantasy of the comedy world. Yet although this is a "nonsense" film, it contains a serious examination of stereotypes of the exotic "Other."

Himalaya Singh consists of a number of interconnected storylines about Hong Kong characters in India, with several Hong Kong actors also playing Indian characters. The film begins with a voice-over narrator stating that people in India believe that the world is a creation of the god Brahma's dream and if he were to wake everything would be destroyed. We are then introduced to Himalaya Singh (Ronald Cheng) who has grown up on the mountains without any human contact

besides his parents (both also played by Ronald Cheng). A message delivered by mobile phone tells Singh that his mission in life is to descend the mountains to marry Indian Beauty (Gauri Karnik), the daughter of the King of Yoga. Singh must win a yoga competition in order to gain her hand in marriage. Singh is also encouraged by his father to experience being “bad” before embarking on a life of good, and is given a pouch containing memory-erasing Magic Oil in case he loses his way too far. Singh contorts himself into a human ball and tumbles down the mountain in lightning speed, accidentally winning another competition when he lands at the mountain’s base, entitling him to marry Tally (Cherrie Ying), a tough-acting female gangster. However, Singh insists on fulfilling his mission to marry Indian Beauty and, spurned, Tally sets out to bring out the “badness” in Singh. She shows him martial arts DVDs to teach him how to kill people, but the discs have been switched with pornographic videos, resulting in a humorous scene in which Singh tries to “kill” his opponents by making love to them. An old disc also reveals an Indian version of Hong Kong classic *God of Gamblers* (Wong Jing, 1989) (this one titled *Indian God of Gamblers*), just one of many intertextual references to local Hong Kong and other global cinemas from *Somewhere in Time* (Jeannot Szwarc, 1980) to *Kill Bill* (Quentin Tarantino, 2003).

A second converging plotline involves a group of tourists visiting India from Hong Kong: Uncle Panic (Lau Ching-wan) and his two nephews (Wong Yau-nam and Tsui Tin-yau, a.k.a. Shine), and a fellow traveler (Francis Ng). Uncle Panic is accosted by Indian beggars who hypnotize him before robbing him, causing him to hallucinate that he is married to a beautiful woman (Cecilia Cheung) who is actually a magical peacock. When he returns to reality from this magical reverie, Uncle Panic searches the streets of India for the thieves to hypnotize him again and is eventually led to the palace of Indian Beauty who falls in love with him as a result of the meddling of a mystical two-headed talking snake. Uncle Panic’s nephews and their fellow traveler lose their memories after drinking Magic Oil. They cook and eat the talking snake and develop the ability to contort their bodies like the snake. The King of Yoga, who sees their contorted bodies, believes one of them to be Himalaya Singh, exclaiming in surprise that Singh is a “Chinaman, not Hindustan.” As S.V. Srinivas (2011) notes, this is the only explicit reference made in the film to race.

Despite the film’s reticence (in the dialogue) on the point of racial difference, *Himalaya Singh* is “replete with Orientalist stereotypes” about India (Srinivas 2011). Indian communities expressing concerns about the film were consulted by the Television and Entertainment Licensing Authority of Hong Kong although the film was cleared of the need for censorship (TELA 2005). Beyond an easy denouncement or dismissal of the film’s use of stereotypes, it is possible to read the film from a different perspective, through the trope of misrecognition or mistaken identity (Srinivas 2011).

As recounted in the film’s convoluted narrative, the characters constantly misrecognize themselves as others, or see others as something they are not. The traveler played by Francis Ng believes he is the uncle of the two boys, Uncle Panic

thinks he is married to a woman who is really a peacock, and the King of Yoga misrecognizes his daughter's betrothed, Himalaya Singh. In one sequence, the forgetful traveler and his "nephews" meet an Indian man from Hong Kong (a curry seller from Chungking Mansions), who was imprisoned for murder. He has returned to India with his children to beg forgiveness from his wife. In their confused state, the travelers assume this story as their own, tearfully running to greet their "wife" and "mother" in an emotional homecoming. The humor of this scene aside, what is the significance of having an Indian character from Hong Kong returning "home" to India in this New Year film? And how does the Hong Kong Chinese characters' misrecognition of the Indian man's life story as their own reflect on the stereotyping of their own bodies? After a crushing scene of rejection from their "wife" and "mother," the travelers resort to writing notes on each other's bodies to remind themselves of their "true" identity.

The many cases of misrecognition and mistaken identity providing for the film's comedic moments disrupt the easy mapping of stereotypes onto the "Other" (in this case exotic India / Indians), since these stereotypes are also "assumed" by the Hong Kong Chinese themselves and taken on as part of their own identity. The bodily transformations of the characters, both through the physical performance of the actors and through computer-generated imagery (CGI), work against the fixity of the stereotypes that circulate in the film.

The film culminates with a yoga competition between Uncle Panic, Himalaya Singh, and the traveler with Uncle Panic's nephews, to win Indian Beauty's hand in marriage. Following three rounds of physical challenges, all requiring bodily contortions and physical transformations, the final task involves solving a riddle of a symbol with a snake biting its own tail. Himalaya Singh wins the competition by reaching a state of meditation that enlightens him to the answer but in the process he fails to regain consciousness. It is now Himalaya Singh's turn to watch over the sleeping Brahma. The film ends with Singh disturbing Brahma's sleep, thus setting in process the beginning of life again for all of the characters in the Stone Age.

It is easy to dismiss this "nonsense" film as being insubstantial or insignificant, but the fact that the film reached a wide audience as a New Year release suggests that it is meaningful to give some weight its affective quality as a comedy, provoking laughter that is as much shared as it can be divisive. To return to the point made at the beginning of the chapter on the "structure of sentiment" necessary to imagine regional solidarities in Asia where material conditions are not yet in place, the following comments by S.V. Srinivas on *Himalaya Singh* are noteworthy. Srinivas (2011) writes:

While the film does not explicitly deal with the issue of trans-cultural / national solidarities, it presents the interesting problem posed by the domain of representation for such an effort. The effort to build inter-Asia solidarities has as its first obstacle and most readily available resource a popular culture that is saturated with stereotypes of the Asian other.

In *Himalaya Singh*, the possibility of “transcendence” for all of the characters is ultimately achievable only through the transformation of their minds (and bodies) towards a greater imaginative challenge – the ability to see oneself through the eyes of the “other.”

Conclusion: Re-Imagining the Hong Kong Body

From fractured bodies in *Shinjuku Incident*, to the exiles of Patrick Tam’s *After This Our Exile*, to the transformation of bodies (and affect) in *Himalaya Singh*, the reimagining of the body in recent Hong Kong cinema has been wrestled with in the realm of representation, with the placement of these bodies in “exotic” locales such as Japan, Malaysia, and India as a way of redefining the Hong Kong body in the context of a burgeoning Asian regionalism. Inter-Asian solidarities have been imagined differently in each case, as an impossibility (when nationalist politics remain insurmountable, as in *Shinjuku Incident*), as an alternative “home” when the original is no longer as you remembered it or as it ever was (*After This Our Exile*), or as a tentative alliance formed through the empathetic quality of comedy (*Himalaya Singh*). These are not easy representations, nor are they devoid of the power of stereotypes to offend as much as they are able to provoke new thought. However, by placing the Hong Kong body within a broader regional frame, there is scope to imagine how this body is being transformed by new representational tactics and debates into the twenty-first century that are shifting the terms of reference outside of the Hong Kong–China and Hong Kong-and-the-West double-bind where it has remained for some time.

Notes

- 1 The reception of Hong Kong cinema within Asia, and the localization of its forms and genres, has been the subject of numerous enquiries: Srinivas (2003) has traced the circulation of B-grade Hong Kong action cinema in India, Davis and Yeh (2002) have considered Hong Kong–Japanese bilateral connections using the rubric of “Japan Hongscreens,” Lee (2006) has explored South Korea’s fascination with films from Hong Kong, and Teo (2008) has examined the circulation of Hong Kong films among the Chinese diaspora in East and Southeast Asia. Adam Knee (2006) has surveyed the representation of Thailand and Thai characters in Hong Kong cinema, and Lo Kwai-cheung (2005, 2009) has explored Hong Kong cinema’s relationship with Japan, including through cross-racial performances.
- 2 Japan as a promised land of opportunities is reiterated several times throughout the film. Jie tells Steelhead, “you can get anything you want here.”

- 3 The film features scenes of extreme violence and was not released in China because Yee believed it would not pass the censors (not only because of the film's display of violence but also for the storyline of Chinese wanting to flee to Japan). The film was, however, shown in Southeast Asia and Japan.
- 4 The film's English title is a line from the Catholic hymn, *Salve Regina* (*Hail Holy Queen*), which instead references the mother figure.
- 5 The film is dedicated to Tam's students in Malaysia and Hong Kong, and the script was a product of workshops Tam conducted in Malaysia in 1995.

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Animating the Translocal

The McDull Films as a Cultural and Visual Expression of Hong Kong

Kimburley Wing-yee Choi and Steve Fore

Unlike classic Hollywood, the Hong Kong movie industry has never nurtured a parallel assembly line devoted to the production of animation. Consequently, the history of animation in Hong Kong is fitful and fragmentary, with few notable commercial or artistic successes over a span of several decades. It comes as something of a surprise, then, that arguably the most culturally distinctive and artistically creative series of films to emerge in the relative doldrums that have defined Hong Kong cinema in the twenty-first century features a naïve young pig, his endlessly resourceful working-class mother, and a supporting cast of friends, teachers, and mentors of various species (including human).

Beginning as a two-person team creating McMug comic strips, Brian Tse (writer) and Alice Mak (cartoonist) have turned their initially modest creative effort into a series of books, educational kits, multimedia productions, television programs and, finally, the McDull feature-length animated movies. Because of their comic-qua-tragic narratives, inventive animation style, the liberal use of untranslatable Cantonese vernacular speech, and acutely observational and gently parodic commentaries on Hong Kong cityscapes and culture, the McDull franchise connects uniquely with local cultural and social sentiments.

Nevertheless, as the production mode of McDull movies has shifted from “100% Hong Kong” to Hong Kong–China co-productions, changes in the content and thematic emphases have followed. By examining key narrative tropes and production constraints within the context of larger transformations in Hong Kong movie production practice, we argue that the four McDull movies produced between 2001 to 2012¹ sometimes articulate and sometimes challenge the idea of “local consciousness,” and shift from a relatively static place-based concept to an open

and porous concept highlighting interconnections and multiplicity (Massey 1994). In addition, we discuss the series' distinctive visual style, which is specifically designed to augment, complement, illustrate, and comment upon the social environments inhabited by the characters through images that are themselves emphatically local and recognizable, yet often defamiliarized. Cumulatively, the stories and visual imagery of the McDull films demonstrate the rise of local consciousness and the quest for identity in Hong Kong popular culture in the late 1990s, the Hong Kong people's changing spatial practices, the development of a translocal imaginary after the 1997 handover, and the struggle to cope with China's cultural censorship policies and renationalization practices in the twenty-first century.

From Print to Television Series and Cinema: *My Life as McDull*

In 1988, Brian Tse (writer) and Alice Mak (cartoonist) introduced their four-panel comic strip "McMug" in a newspaper column. By 1990, Tse and Mak founded their own company, Bliss Publishing, and "McMug" was published in *Ming Pao Children's Weekly*, a supplement of *Ming Pao Weekly*, then in the adult-oriented *Ming Pao Weekly*, the most popular local magazine during the 1990s, and eventually expanding to a two-page spread. In 1993, Tse and Mak published *Yellow Bus*, a free children's magazine distributed with *Sunday Weekly*. After receiving a more stable infusion of funding from an investor, Bliss started to produce multimedia educational kits, animated television programs, and animated movies. In 1997, Bliss started producing the McMug TV animation series.

The protagonist in *Yellow Bus* was a young pig named McMug. The name is a pun: Since McMug is a piglet, Hong Kong people refer to him as "Pig-Mug" in Cantonese, a slang term describing silly people in a non-derogatory sense. Another way to understand the meaning of McMug is through its sound in Cantonese. "Pig-Mug" in Cantonese sounds as "Chu Mug," the meaning of which is close to "dreamer" in English. The name McMug therefore suggests a person not afraid of being silly or stupid, and who loves to pursue dreams. This is also Tse's usual rhetorical strategy – by drawing on Hong Kong's hybrid culture and the creative but sometimes profane Cantonese dialect and slang, as well as more standard Chinese and English, he creates stories with substance and humor that resonate most immediately with native speakers and local residents.

In 1997, Bliss moved from publishing to animation production, thanks to the cooperation of a larger company. They were contracted to create thirteen episodes of "McMug" for Interactive Television (iTV, a division of Hong Kong Telecom) over a period of three years. McDull is a relative of McMug and was initially a supporting character in McMug comics, but he became the franchise's main protagonist in the shift to animation production. Unlike McMug, who comes from a middle-class nuclear family with father, mother, and two siblings, McDull's

background is as an only child in a working-class, single-parent family. As suggested by his name “Pig-Dull,” he is a woefully underachieving kindergarten piglet. Unlike McMug, McDull cannot recite Shakespeare sonnets, and his relatively unfavorable family and economic circumstances limit his opportunities. However, as a simple, honest, optimistic, slow but gentle piglet, McDull keeps pursuing his dreams even though he fails every time.

As the title suggests, *My Life as McDull* chronicles McDull’s life from birth to adulthood. The animation is assembled as a series of intertitled episodes with titles including “My School,” “My Mother,” “My Ideal World,” and “I have grown up.” The film starts with McDull’s mother, Mrs. Mak, in the hospital giving birth to the tune of the song “McDull and Chicken” (Schubert’s “Moments Musicaux No. 3 in F minor” with comic lyrics) This introduces a central theme of the McDull series: we are always forced to be someone we are not. The lyrics of the song are as follows (performed in Cantonese except where indicated):

My name is McDull-dull, my mom is Mrs. Mak-Mak, (我個名叫麥兜兜,我啊媽叫麥太太,)

My favorite food is McNuggets, [Putonghua] let’s eat chicken and sing together! (我最喜愛食麥甩咯,一起吃雞一起在歌唱。)

But in the real world you can only say “yes,” just like quacking ducks. (但現實就似一隻鴨,吓吓一定要Duck。)

But if I can’t, I can’t, what should be done? How can a chicken become a duck? (唔得!唔得!點算啦?點樣令隻雞變做鴨?)

With a chicken bun in my mouth, staring at the chicken roll, (含住個雞包仔,望住四寶雞扎,)

Alas! The real world binds me, like a trussed duck steamed with taro. (可歎現實係要一隻鴨,加塊荔芋共我一起扎。)

I love to eat chicken hot pot, fat chicken butts are my favorite, (我最喜愛食啫啫雞,我最喜愛食雞pat pat,)

My favorite food is soy-sauce chicken wings, [Putonghua] let’s eat chicken and sing together! (我最喜愛食豉油皇雞翼,一起吃雞一起在歌唱。)

I want to eat chicken the most, but in the end I’m forced to be a cured duck! Duck! Duck! Duck! (我最想吃雞,我最終變臘鴨!鴨!鴨!鴨!鴨!)

Tse plays trilingual punning games in this song, such as using the English word “duck” as a homonym of “yes” or “achievable / permissible” in Cantonese. The phrase “eat chicken and sing together” is sung in Putonghua as Tse plays with the similar sounds of the words in that language. Consequently, both local children and adults enjoy the song for its playfulness, and the lyrics add an additional sense of melancholy for the adult audiences, as the song expresses the need to be a chameleon to adapt to fast-changing Hong Kong society.

My Life as McDull is in a sense a contemporary visual ethnography of Hong Kong culture. The segment "My Mother" turns Mrs. Mak into a superwoman with wings in a Super Mario-style video game, defeating enemies on the street, racing with other women for bargains in the supermarket, fighting to board the subway train, and finally defeating a giant robotic boss (complete with briefcase) in Hong Kong's Times Square. The sequence shows Mrs. Mak as a typical aspirational Hong Kong person, hardworking and hyper-competitive in all aspects of life. With high expectations for her son, she imitates the ancient Chinese historical figure and role model Yue Fei's mother, who wrote words on her son's back reminding him to "Serve the country with your utmost loyalty." Mrs. Mak, however, lacks this nationalist fervor; she writes words on McDull's buttocks that order McDull to get into a local university. She knows these nationalistic legends, but she appropriates their form and replaces the emphasis on loyalty to a country with a message of competitively enterprising individualism.

My Life situates the story in Tai Kok Tsui, a cramped, dilapidated, and continually redeveloping working-class district. The detailed recreation of Tai Kok Tsui, with its photorealistic computer animated portrayal of bills and posters on the street, the closed-down shops, the preponderance of property agencies and loan companies, and the twirling construction cranes show a hyperreal (and slightly surreal) image of "ordinary" Hong Kong streets without glamour. (The visual dynamics of the McDull films are discussed in more detail below.) Living most of his life and studying in the same neighborhood, McDull's favorite place to visit is the nearby shopping mall, and his most distant travel destinations are the Peak in Central and Cheung Chau Island (ten kilometers south of Hong Kong Island).

My Life as McDull was assembled substantially from refined versions of episodes from the iTV series. Without the financial support from and collaboration with this larger company, the film would not have been produced. The production team took almost three years to complete the whole iTV series, which seems an extraordinary indulgence for what was intended as a commercial venture. The Bliss production team comprised twelve members, only three of whom had previous animation experience. In allowing Tse's team to produce the episodes slowly, iTV gave them the opportunity to become animation professionals on the fly. Somewhat unexpectedly, *My Life* became a box office hit in 2001; in Hong Kong, it remains the highest-grossing McDull film, taking in HK\$14,571,605, placing it nineteenth in the local box office in 2001.

The Local, Dislocated and Constructed: *McDull Prince de la Bun*

The mutual collaboration with a large established company continued with the second film, *McDull Prince de la Bun* (2004). Following the model of the first film, *Prince* was in part assembled from a five-episode series entitled *Springfield China*

Museum, produced for Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK), Hong Kong's public broadcasting organization. Because of the commercial success of *My Life*, the company received presale funding for the second feature; as a result, Tse and Mak had a good deal of creative freedom with the project, and Tse admitted that he used *Prince* to test the tolerance of the market for experimental, moody, and thematically ambiguous animation. The result is a work that problematizes, through the play of filmic time and space, a conventionally nostalgic view of Hong Kong's past and the city's ongoing struggles with identity formation.

Prince opens with a parting of the curtain on a theater stage, with small children from Springfield Kindergarten telling funny stories laced with Cantonese word play. Miss Chan then tells a story about an idle little prince who is punished by his teacher and becomes a bun. The curtain closes on the film's title, with a piglet's head turning into a buttered pineapple bun, a popular delicacy in *cha chen teng*. The opening sequence alerts the audience that this is a story within a story – actually more of a mosaic of stories – and it is as local as the pineapple bun.

Prince can be divided into three acts. The first act revisits *My Life*'s commentary on the Hong Kong educational system and economic restructuring, peppered with Cantonese tongue twisters, puns, and songs. The second act is Mrs. Mak's chronicle of what became of her missing ex-husband McBing, here cast as the Prince de la Bun. As the story begins, the Prince, whose crown is the titular bun, lives a sheltered life in a palace, and the Queen (a dead ringer for Mrs. Mak) sends him on a journey to see the world. As he sets out, though, there is a slippage (not the first or the last) between reality and fantasy as he emerges in princely garb from the run-down building that houses McDull's kindergarten. As he looks on in wonder, the old grey tenement buildings of Tai Kok Tsui are treated as a stage set being transformed, as if by a magical application of Hong Kong's militantly efficient construction technologies, into a fairy-tale fortress, from a network of narrow streets to pixilated pastoral greenery. What is emphasized here, though (and perhaps as a sardonic critique of the redevelopment process), is the artifice of this new wonderland – the building facades are mere canvas covers hiding the same old structures, and the lovely trees and bushes are obvious two-dimensional mock-ups. As the story progresses, the Prince loses his way (as does the viewer – the filmmakers insert several narrative digressions here), and he and his sidekick Harry Pizza (McDull is a Harry Potter fan) find themselves walking into Hong Kong, with Lion Rock looming ahead of them. Once the Prince believed that he could return home by taking a boat to Portsville (the fairy tale version of Hong Kong), and during the subsequent temporally and spatially discontinuous journey he has several encounters with his guru (as in *My Life*, in the guise of the school principal), whom the Prince imagined as a traveling companion. However, all these hopes turn to disappointment as the story progresses. As we watch, the perplexed-looking Prince magically grows in thirty seconds from a child to a man, from a piglet with a bun's head to a male pig with a chef's hat: he has turned into McBing. Until this point, while the spatial coordinates of the narrative have been radically fragmented and contradictory, the story time

has been the present. In the next section of the tale, though, McBing (along with Mrs. Mak, the tale's teller) decides to chase his memories and his past, and he walks through a container terminal and into a Hong Kong that is an ambiguous mixture of the 1960s and 1970s. This was the place and time that he dated the young Mrs. Mak, Yuk Lin, and we follow their courtship in the streets of Wanchai, a cooked food stall (*dai pai dong*), and a Cantonese opera theater (*hsi p'eng*).

As with *My Life*, *Prince* is open to various interpretations: The inspiration for McBing may be the situation of Chinese intellectuals in the 1950s and 1960s who fled to Hong Kong for political reasons. They did not intend to stay in Hong Kong, and the distressed Prince shares this sojourner mentality. The Prince may also suggest Hong Kong people living under colonial rule before 1997, given the crown on his head. After the handover, the Prince loses his status (i.e., he becomes McBing) and he would like to go back to the past. As a grown-up, McBing attempts to go back to the past several times, and in the midst of his reverie the film suddenly cuts to the present, as the kindergarten headmaster teaches McDull and others to articulate the phrase "forget the past" in different ways in Cantonese. In fact, the more the Prince wants to retain his previous identity, the more he loses his previous belongings: the crown, the bun, and his youth.

Although *Prince* is about stories "under the Lion Rock," these stories are not the same as those of the television series *Below the Lion Rock* produced by RTHK in the 1970s, which encouraged a largely immigrant audience to treat Hong Kong as home and to identify themselves as "Hong Kong people" in order to come together to deal with existing social problems. Instead, *Prince* calls the audience's attention to the provisional nature of identity construction and encourages Hong Kong people to understand that all forms of seeking identity are a creative and mediated experience. McBing, with his friend Harry Pizza and his guru, determine to leave Portsville and search for the lost Imperial Palace, the good old place. In his farewell letter to Yuk Lin, McBing says Portsville is "a place that has never belonged to me." However, as shown in the story's beginning, the imagined palace in fact is situated back in the mundane, all-too-material reality of Tai Kok Tsui. The two places actually are the same place. The element of time is similarly made unstable and discontinuous; during the scenes of McBing and Yuk Lin's courtship in the 1960s and 1970s, their dating location is the Tsing Ma Bridge, which opened in 1997. The present, it is implied, is not a continuous accumulation of the past. Rather, the past and the present, the real and the fictional, are occupying the same space. In a similar vein, the "real" McBing's (Hong Kong) stories live with the fictional through the merging of fantasy and reality, emphasized by the convoluted structure of the Prince's adventures and a shifting (and often unreliable) narrative point of view.

If McBing's quest represents the Hong Kong people's search for identity after the return to Chinese sovereignty, it is implied that this search is in vain. The filmmakers understand, it seems, that identity is not a static thing but a dynamic process, and identity is not constituted through the accretion of the past but the rearrangement of narrative "to the advantage of [a] particular claimant group"

(Massey 1994: 169). McBing's story is a construction, a narrative, a story within a story narrated by Mrs. Mak for the young McDull. It is revealed to the audience that the book McBing asks Yuk Lin to read to understand his identity is actually blank except the title "Prince de la Bun." The constant shift of narrative viewpoint in *Prince* multiplies the ambiguous correlation between the real and imaginary, present and past, and actual and possible. Perhaps McBing creates a past for Mrs. Mak, and Mrs. Mak creates a past for McDull, and both Mrs. Mak and McDull blend the story into McDull's present self. Consequently, the story of McBing and his identity are caught up in a surreal loop of disjointed time. Ultimately, *Prince* shows local uniqueness and specificity and its constructedness at the same time.

The production of both *My Life* and *Prince* can be seen as author-centered, in that Brian Tse, as the writer of both films, enjoyed free rein to explore his own imaginative vision. Although both *My Life* and *Prince* were directed by Toe Yuen, the creative team was led by Tse. Ng Chun-hung has described the McDull production process as author-led, modestly scaled, and flexible: "The creation of Tse can be arbitrary, dominated by his personal taste and mood" (Ng 2006: 143). Yuen has said that it was difficult to work with Tse, that he found his role contradictory as "a director but not having real decision-making power," and that the flexibility Tse prefers resulted in a "the lack of a clear planning" (Chan 2011: 250–251). In an interview, Tse also admitted that his leadership of the McDull creative team is somewhat authoritarian, saying "The completion of a creative work is actually quite complex, from the use of all kinds of oppression to an extreme dictatorship. These tricks can be in an endless stream, or you just cannot complete the work" (Tong 2008: 54). However, the third and the fourth McDull movies were Hong Kong–China co-productions, and Tse found it necessary to change his usual production methods in order to qualify the animations under rather arcane legal requirements.

CEPA and Delocalization: Hong Kong–China Co-productions

Following the monumental political transition of 1997, the Asian financial crisis of 1997–1998, the September 11 attacks of 2001, the challenge of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress to Hong Kong's juridical autonomy in 1999 and 2003, the death of several local entertainment superstars in 2002 and 2003, the spread of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) of 2003, and the July 1 protest rally opposing the anti-subversion legislation of Basic Law Article 23 in 2003, Hong Kong was described as the "City of Glass," a suddenly fragile city experiencing an economic downturn, the loss of civil rights and liberties, and the utter finality of death after thirty years' prosperity. Some of the difficulties Hong Kong people faced in the years before and after the millennium can be seen as natural disasters, but some are connected with the city's often difficult political and cultural relationship with China.

The Hong Kong film industry has seen the number of specifically local film productions drop drastically since 1997. In the 1980s, Hong Kong was the world's third-largest movie producer, averaging over 200 films per year; in 1997, only 90 films were produced, down 22 per cent from the previous year. This decline has only accelerated, dropping from 90–150 production during 1997–2003 to 50–64 productions from 2004–2011 (Chung 2012: 3). China, on the other hand, produced over 890 films in 2012 and is now the third-largest film producer in the world, after India and United States. China is also the fastest-growing movie market in the world. In 2012, China's box office receipts exceeded RMB17 billion (US\$2.7 billion) (SARFT 2013).

In a measure intended to revive Hong Kong's flagging economy in 2003, right before the largest July 1 ("Hong Kong SAR Establishment Day") protest since the handover, the Chinese government and the HKSAR government signed a bilateral trade agreement called the Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement (CEPA). The goal of the pact was to loosen restrictions on the access of Hong Kong products to the mainland market. In the area of film production, Hong Kong–China co-productions are classified as domestic movies, and therefore not subject to the import quota of 20 non-Chinese films a year; there is also a waiver of import taxes and a larger share of the box office for the Hong Kong partner. Restrictions on personnel are also relaxed from a 3:7 minimum ratio of Hong Kong to mainland employees to a more Hong Kong-friendly 5:5. Nevertheless, under CEPA, Hong Kong–China co-productions still require one-third of the main cast to be Chinese mainlanders, and there must be a mainland thread in the story. In addition, these films are required to meet the censorship standards of the State Administration of Radio Film and Television (SARFT).

The process of doing a co-production under these regulations is complicated, involving numerous reviews of a film's script and the "final" version of the film itself by several state agencies in China. According to Cheung (Cheung 2013: 4–5), the process can be briefly described as follows:

- 1 The Hong Kong company should have a recognized track record of film production.
- 2 The Hong Kong company identifies a SARFT-sanctioned company in China with which to sign a cooperation agreement.
- 3 The film company in China is responsible for handling the film project through the China Film Co-production Corporation, a subsidiary of China Film Group Corporation, a unit directly under SARFT, which oversees all Sino-foreign co-productions. At this stage, the film company must submit a complete script for review.
- 4 Once the China Film Co-production Corporation approves the film script, it will then be reviewed by the relevant SARFT departments and officials.
- 5 Following SARFT approval, the agency will formally agree to the production of the project and issue a "shooting permit," allowing the project to proceed.

- 6 Film companies should start production after step 5. After finishing the film, the China Film Co-production Corporation will review the rough cut for content and the final cut for technical review, and then it will be sent to SARFT for review and yet another approval. Both of these units may remove sections of a movie deemed offensive or inappropriate. After approval, SARFT will issue a “screening permit” for theatrical release.

All Hong Kong–China co-production film projects need to submit a full script, rough cut, and final cut to strict scrutiny from two mainland units: the China Film Co-production Corporation and the relevant SARFT departments. The Chinese co-producer may also give suggestions on the script in relation to the China market and censorship issues. Under these policies, Hong Kong filmmakers face a censorship apparatus that is stricter than the one applied to mainland-only productions. In 2004, the state authorities relaxed the requirement for mainland companies to submit a full script for perusal; now they need only provide a synopsis (of at least 3,000 words) of the proposed project for prior approval. Recently, the regulation seems to have been further revised such that a “synopsis is to be submitted for reference only.” (Chan, Fung and Ng 2010: 70)

Since all project evaluations are written in point form without identifying the author(s), Hong Kong film producers cannot ask the responsible person or unit to elaborate their comments, nor is there an opportunity for further negotiation. As a result, Hong Kong filmmakers must prepare scripts with great caution. Some topics are obviously taboo, including politics (i.e., negative portrayals of modern China and state apparatuses), the supernatural, explicit sex scenes, excessive violence, gambling, drug use, prostitution, and homosexual love stories. A heterosexual love story, however, may also be censored if it carries an “unhealthy social message” such as a love triangle. That is, although CEPA is an economic arrangement between China and Hong Kong, it has a political agenda. Because of the booming commercial market and huge financial and human resources of the mainland compared with the shrinking Hong Kong and pan-Asian markets, CEPA strengthens Hong Kong filmmakers’ financial dependence on China. Restrictions on subject matter and settings may result in the delocalization and re-nationalization of Hong Kong cinema.

When feasible, filmmakers have attempted to resist censorship by producing two versions of a project, one for the mainland and one meant for screening in Hong Kong. Another strategy for Hong Kong filmmakers to produce a story with sensitive subject matter mainly situated in Hong Kong is to choose Sil-Metropole Organization as the Chinese partner for a co-production. Because of its subtle historical links with the Chinese government, the company has the same status as a state-owned studio and the favorable status of a Chinese partner on co-productions, even though it is a Hong Kong-registered company. And it seems that films with the Sil-Metropole imprimatur can “get away with” more. For example, such co-productions include *Cold War* (Sunny Luk and Longman Leung, 2012), which

comments on Hong Kong's rule of law and changing status and identity after the handover; and *Overheard* (Felix Chong and Alan Mak, 2009) as well as *Overheard 2* (Felix Chong and Alan Mak, 2011) which feature corrupt police and discuss the distrust of law enforcement and the legal system in the context of capitalist finance.²

Masquerade and Border Crossing: McDull *Kung Fu Ding Ding Dong*

Following the adoption of CEPA, the number of Hong Kong–China co-productions rose from 12 in 2002, to 31 in 2004, 29 in 2005, and 39 in 2006 (Chan et al. 2010: 72), while the annual production of all Hong Kong movies slipped from 92 in 2002, to 64 in 2004, 55 in 2005, and 51 in 2006 (Chung 2012: 3). The first two McDull films were entirely Hong Kong financed and produced, and the strong emphasis on local issues and social sentiments in both certainly helped the franchise become further entrenched as a Hong Kong cultural icon. In 2005, Tse mentioned in an interview that he had not considered distributing *Prince* in the mainland because of China's then-small market share and censorship problems (Tong 2008: 52), but within a year Tse clearly had changed his mind (as indicated in another interview with Ng [2006]). Between 2003 and 2007, box office revenues for Hong Kong productions dropped from HK\$433 million (US\$55.5 million) to HK\$220 million (US\$28.2 million) (Chung 2012: 3), whereas the mainland revenues of Hong Kong–China co-productions rose from RMB 0.2 billion (US\$0.032 billion) to RMB1.5 billion (US\$ 0.24 billion) (China News Service 2012). The Hong Kong box office for McDull films also dropped from HK\$14 million (US\$1.8 million) for *My Life as McDull* to HK\$4.7 million (US\$0.6 million) for *Prince de la bun*.

Although the project that became *McDull Kung Fu Ding Ding Dong* (2009) received HK\$3.6 million (US\$460,000) from the HKSAR government's Film Development Fund Scheme for Financing Film Production in 2008, this sum covered only one-third of the total production cost. In fact, the Film Development Fund only provides subsidy for projects which already have secured third-party financing. In addition, the film must be deemed "commercially viable." In other words, local independent filmmakers cannot simply rely on government support for the production of local movies, and the rising China film market seemed the only way for Tse to make another McDull movie: "I've got no other way. The Hong Kong box office alone can't support making an animation. You can't even cover the cost. If you want to make a movie, it is necessary to enter the establishment" (East Touch 2009: B92–95).

As it turned out, Tse was right, in that the local box office of *Kung Fu* was HK\$2.5 million (US\$320,000) only, while the film earned more than RMB80 million (US\$13 million) in China. As the franchise's mainland debut, the form and content of *Kung Fu* were somewhat different from the previous two McDull movies. In order to qualify as a Hong Kong–China co-production, the story mostly takes place in

China. There are two main plotlines in *Kung Fu*. One is set in ancient China and features McDull's ancestor Mak Zi, an insignificant philosopher and inventor who comes up with useless things such as invisible ink and invisible paper. The other storyline begins in contemporary Hong Kong and then moves to China. The premise is that Mrs. Mak finds herself increasingly losing her competitiveness, and decides to take McDull to the booming mainland, where she seeks to fulfill her dream of opening a barbecue restaurant called "Chicken on Fire." She enrolls McDull in the Spring Flower Gate School to learn the martial art *Tai Chi*, and later McDull represents the academy in an international children's martial arts competition. These two plots run separately until Mak Zi's incredibly slow-running clock invention projects Mak Zi's image in the sky above the stadium (Mak Zi appears to have invented animation hundreds of years ago!) and inspires McDull to his best performance. However, in the end McDull is still soundly trounced in the martial arts competition, and Mrs. Mak's dream of entrepreneurship also fails – briefly inspired by national consciousness, she opens her chicken restaurant in her ancestral village, where the foot traffic proves nonexistent. She subsequently re-launches her venture back in Tai Kok Tsui (apparently, as we see in a flashforward, with modest, though heartwarming, success).

Because of the change of primary story locale, hyperreal images of the Hong Kong cityscape are replaced with more impressionistic Chinese scenes: the Wuhan streetscape, Kat Hing Street, the Wudang Mountains, Yellow Crane Tower, and Three Gorges Dam. Instead of Hong Kong *cha chen teng* food, the characters eat Wuhan noodles and duck neck. Besides Mozart music and songs by the Hong Kong vulgar singing icon Wan Kwong, we also hear the old Cantonese nursery rhyme "Bright Moonlight" (月光光) and the folk song "Fengyang flower drum" (鳳陽花鼓). Once McDull arrives at the martial arts school in the Wudang Mountains, he also changes his costume, from a turned-around baseball cap (and nothing else) to Taoist robes and hair in a traditional bun.

Hong Kong film critics did not praise *Kung Fu* as highly as the previous two films, partly due to the fact that its representation of local spaces is not as detailed and developed. In a discussion by the Hong Kong Film Critics Society, one critic found the representation of the Wudang Mountains fictional and imaginary, and another said the first two McDull movies are about the spirit of Hong Kong and local people's sentiments, but *Kung Fu* takes McDull to the Wudang Mountains without the same level of visual and cultural detail and insight (HKFCS 2010: 196–198).

In fact, Tse represents modern cities and other locations in China in a deliberately generic way in both *Kung Fu* and *The Pork of Music* (2012), the fourth McDull movie. Because both are co-productions, he was required to accede to the request of the mainland officials to blur geographic and historical specificity:

In co-productions, naturally you have to work with mainland units... Do you notice that we don't emphasize local specificity? It is because they demand that the story should take place in the mainland, but they also don't want you to portray that place

in a specific way. For example, I would like to add a sequence in Shanghai [in *Pork of Music*], but if I represent Shanghai clearly, then I need to consider if such representations vilify Shanghai. Will it get passed in the review process? It's just like last time [in *Kung Fu*], the story takes place in Wudang, but we don't clearly say it is Wudang, because how do you know what responses Wudang Taoists will have? This is the "China problem" – we have spent one year for script development, review and approval (Chak 2012).

The Bliss producers negotiated a number of specific amendments and alterations to the script. The film's original title, *McDull Wudang*, was changed to *McDull Kung Fu Ding Ding Dong* after a script review. In keeping with the standard practice of anonymous authorship, the rationale for this edict was not explained – "the officials would not explain what was wrong with the film title" (East Touch 2009: B92–95). In another instance, even though *Kung Fu* does not touch upon any of the forbidden topics indicated above, mainland officials were rather reluctant to approve the Mak Zi story because of its fabricated nature. Consequently, the usual process of the McDull creative team was disrupted; as Tse put it,

Actually, the story of McDull going to Wudang can be seen as another *Harry Potter*: the Hogwarts School becomes Wudang, and wizardry turns to Taoist beliefs. But you worry if the authority will accept it. We make animation. It would be a disaster if we cannot get approval after finishing all the drawings. To spend another two years to do the drawings again? As a responsible producer, I could not help but think about these questions (East Touch 2009: B92–95).

In catering to the mainland market, the quantity of non-translatable Cantonese slang and puns in *Kung Fu* has been considerably reduced. Equivalents of some Cantonese phrases are not included in Putonghua and English subtitles because of the specificity of geographic and linguistic context. For example, in one scene, both Mrs. Mak and McDull independently promise to give up eating their favorite chicken if McDull can become a smart boy. After learning that McDull made such a pledge, Mrs. Mak is both angry and sad, and she vows with McDull always to be honest with oneself. In the literal translation, they say they would not "sell their own pigs" (賣自己豬仔), a phrase referring to the Chinese slave trade and self-betrayal. However, in the English and Putonghua version, their vow is translated into "Never sell out our chicken." Tse found that he could not accurately translate the local meaning and ended up taking out the Cantonese slang. Still, the change of workflow and setting do not alter McDull's sweet, emotional, humorous, but ironic and unwittingly critical tendencies. In fact, McDull and his mother's pledge is significant in the sense that although Tse set his creative team to the task of navigating the complex landscape of the co-production project (much as Mrs. Mak takes McDull into the unknown through their journey to China), he worked to avoid "selling their own pigs" – *Kung Fu* still is rather more than a cute, simple nationalistic animation aiming simply to please mainland audiences.

One recurrent motif in *My Life*, *Prince*, and *Kung Fu* involves the Springfield Kindergarten children singing the school song, the opening phrase of which has a melody similar to the famous socialist anthem “L’Internationale.” Rewritten lyrics, the use of dialect, the song’s tempo, and the children’s rhythm and tone provide a subtle but critical commentary on the relationship between Hong Kong and mainland society. In *My Life*, Tse exploits the propensity for the use of homonyms in Cantonese to create lyrics with more than one meaning. When the song is sung in Cantonese, a Cantonese-literate audience hears, “We are all happy children, we sing every day!” However, if a Cantonese audience *reads* the Chinese lyrics, they are nonsensical, translating literally as “Goose full of fast branded drops severe earache, goose bored every day a play window!” (鵝滿是快烙滴好耳痛, 鵝悶天天一戲個窗!) Also in *My Life*, Tse parodies the Cantonese translations of Western religious music sung by Hong Kong Christian and Catholic school students. These songs always focus on meaning without paying attention to Cantonese tones, and the wrong tones create great hilarity for children.

In *Prince*, the school song is sung again, but in Putonghua. Compared with the performance in *My Life*, with the children singing vigorously and in unison, the rendition in *Prince* is haphazard and out of tune. Since *Prince* talks about Springfield kindergarten implementing “two languages-three dialects” teaching and learning, the shambolic performance suggests that the HKSAR government’s efforts to promote national culture and language have not been very successful.

Kung Fu, as a co-production project, provides a complicated heteroglossia in the by-now-anticipated school song performance. In the Cantonese version, the audience can hear that the lyrics have been slightly modified to “We are the good children of China” (我們是中國的好兒童), suggesting that national education does not ask children to be happy, but simply loyal and nationalistic. The children sing in a languid and dispirited way, implying that the target audience of national education does not seem to respond to the initiative enthusiastically. At the same time, the Chinese subtitle of this phrase is different from the sound track, reading “We are all good ding ding dong children” (我們是响噹噹的好兒童). Interestingly, on the soundtrack of the Putonghua version, the words “ding ding dong” are barely heard, and this creates unsettling meanings. The hybrid utterance that Tse uses in this section demonstrates his desire to avoid censorship on the one hand and a critical social commentary on Chinese society on the other.

Despite its toned-down commentary, *Kung Fu* offers critical reflections on Chinese culture. In the beginning, in evaluating McDull’s abilities, a university professor says that “he is not retarded, he is only gentle.” Although the boy is slow-witted, he can also be a capable *kung fu* pupil if he follows his nature. The Chinese martial art *Tai Chi* suits McDull because its combat technique emphasizes the use of gentleness to counter a vigorous force. However, it is implied, if McDull just wants to be like other “ordinary” Hong Kong kids who are trained to emphasize aggression and efficiency, he is doomed to failure because he follows his nature. Similarly, the headmaster of Spring Flower Gate Academy (who, of course, looks

exactly like the principal of the Springfield Kindergarten) believes that he lost a competition with the international action star “Pruce Lee,” and therefore went into seclusion and tried to make Taoist martial arts more modern and practical. After many attempts, he was not successful simply because *Tai Chi* is just different from modern *kung fu*. The headmaster does not follow the nature of *tao* and *Tai Chi*. Similarly, the Chinese government follows the models of other nations in pursuit of modernization and urbanization. When ancient relics and structures are not specifically recognized by UNESCO as part of China’s “intangible cultural heritage,” the government simply ignores or tears down these vestiges of the past on the basis that they lack economic value. In *Kung Fu*, Tse reminds us that there are many things in China that may lack practical value but are nonetheless beautiful, true, and necessary to the civic health of the country and its people.

Translocal Hong Kong Subjectivity: McDull: *The Pork of Music* (2012)

In contrast to the previous films’ aggressively digressive satires, the relatively direct narrative structure and emotionally affective pleasures of *McDull: The Pork of Music* seem to suggest Tse’s further adaptation to the China market. *Pork* concerns the debt-ridden Springfield Kindergarten’s fight for survival, with the headmaster trying to raise funds by running the Springfield Choir, a chorus group featuring the school’s pupils, to pay the rent. Managed by the agent Big M, the choir gets opportunities to sing in a mainland shopping mall, a wedding banquet, a tycoon’s birthday party, a funeral, and even as part of local pop star Andy Lau’s concert at the Hong Kong Coliseum and subsequent China tour. In the end, despite the choir’s success, the crooked Big M absconds with the proceeds and the kindergarten finally has to fold up.

To adapt to the co-production regulations, some scenes in *Pork* take place in China, for instance when the headmaster goes to the mainland to search for Big M, performances by the children’s choir in Shenzhen, Shanghai, and Macau, and, following his ultimate defeat, when the headmaster moves to Gulangyu Island. As with *Kung Fu*, each of these places (except Macau) is not shown with significant geographical specificity. Nevertheless, the broad portrayal of mainland locations in *Pork* produces different effects, insofar as the boundary between Hong Kong and China seems blurred when the audience has difficulty identifying the precise setting of a specific scene.

At the same time, however, *Pork* preserves a number of identifiably Hong Kong elements. Although McDull travels to different places in Hong Kong and China with his fellow choir members, the main story of the headmaster bringing children to sing in different venues satirizes the gap between rich and poor, the commodification of art (the management of a shopping mall put out a set of a pig’s

intestines as an installation display to attract visitors), the hypocrisy and duplicity of a Hong Kong District Councilor in providing favors to certain people, the deceitfulness of corporate types, and the fluctuations of the financial market. The last act in Macau also shows the historical importance of Hong Kong in nurturing world-famous celebrities.

Another point of comparison between *Kung Fu* and *Pork* is the use of music and songs. *Kung Fu* includes eight songs, two of which are non-Cantonese Chinese folk tunes. As an explicitly music-centered film, *Pork* uses several different types of songs, based around the premise that beautiful music encourages people to poop. *Pork* contains more than 22 songs (not counting background music), including Western classical music, Hong Kong pop songs, a British folk song, a Japanese pop song, and even a Taiwanese Southern Min folk song. However, there are no Chinese folk songs or melodies derived from the Chinese classical tradition.

The nature of the Chinese co-production partners may provide a clue to the relocalization of the franchise in *The Pork of Music*. In *Kung Fu* and *Pork*, the Hong Kong companies Bliss Concepts and Well Talent Hong Kong (both are Tse and Mak's companies – they rename the production entity for each new project) worked with the same production companies in China. Bliss Concepts affiliated with the Shanghai Media Group and Sunwah Media for *Kung Fu* and Well Talent worked with Shanghai Toonmax Media Company Limited and Sunwah on *Pork*. In fact, Toonmax was created in 2009 as a subsidiary of the Shanghai Media Group. The growing mutual familiarity of the partners may have enhanced the level of credibility and trust, resulting in a smoother production process and emboldening the Hong Kong filmmakers to test the supposedly more relaxed attitudes of the mainland censors with regard to co-productions.

Portraying more Hong Kong elements does not mean *Pork* is place-bound. The film's portrayal of Hong Kong life is more fluid and expressionistic than that of the previous McDull movies. The opening scene unfolds a panoramic view of Hong Kong places, both scenic and prosaic: Lion Rock, the Hong Kong Coliseum, bank buildings, funeral homes, a container terminal, and industrial sites. Instead of representing Tai Kok Tsui in the meticulous detail of previous films, suggesting a place-bound identity, *Pork* places more emphasis on geographical mobility. This mobility also extends to the mainland. McDull and friends get on the school bus and arrive in Shenzhen, and then they just take a plane and visit Shanghai – it is all very matter of fact. The anxiety of border crossing in *Kung Fu* has been replaced by McDull's simple happiness, visiting new places for fun and adventure. At the end of the story, the headmaster leaves Hong Kong altogether and relocates to Gulangyu Island, off Xiamen in southeastern China. The headmaster and McDull's translocal travels are initially utilitarian (to save the Springfield Kindergarten), but their cumulative effects are more than that. The headmaster's passion for music and identity is connected to Hong Kong but not tied only to the city. Rather, his translocal experiences contribute to his growing attachment to multiple places. Would such multiple attachments to Hong Kong and mainland places constitute

the emergence of genuinely vertical translocal-national sentiments? In *Pork*, it seems not. The McDull characters' mobility results neither in the renationalization of Hong Kong subjects nor the reconstruction of the national imaginary. Instead, it seems to have the effect of multiplying the horizontal orientation of the translocal imaginary, such that Hong Kong people may feel connected not only to their home city but also to other localities, while still retaining a sense of Hong Kong identity.

McDull's Visual World: Rhizomes, Psychogeographies, and Topographies

What if space is the sphere not of a discrete multiplicity of inert *things*, even one which is thoroughly interrelated? What if, instead, it presents us with a heterogeneity of practices and *processes*? Then it will be not an already-interconnected whole but an ongoing product of interconnections and not. Then it will be always unfinished and open (Massey 2005: 107).

At first glance, the visual logic of the McDull films is simultaneously coherent, in that the appearance and brand identity of the franchise's iconic characters is (mostly) graphically consistent, and a semiotic jumble, in that the pictorial depiction of the settings in which the characters reside, as well as the portrayal of supporting characters, may vary dramatically from one narrative arc or vignette to the next. In one scene (for instance, the beginning of both *My Life as McDull* and *McDull, Prince de la Bun*), the Tai Kok Tsui neighborhood is portrayed with three-dimensional, photorealistic fidelity (although, as we shall see, this apparent illusionism is repeatedly and playfully undermined) as it is traversed by characters that are obviously cartoons. In another (in *My Life as McDull*), the tourist area of Victoria Peak is drawn in a 2D style that matches the character animation. In yet another (a rooftop banquet early in *The Pork of Music*), the high-rise dominated built environment surrounding Springhill Kindergarten is rendered more as a recognizably local but generic background while an array of supporting human characters are drawn as a motley array of grotesque caricatures, an aggressive stylization that contrasts sharply with the familiar pastel cuteness of the anthropomorphized animal stars of the films.

The signature graphic style of the McDull animations is based, that is, on an aggressive pursuit of visual heterogeneity. The viewer is never sure what each successive scene will look like. Cumulatively, this is a visual style that evokes Deleuze and Guattari's metaphoric appropriation of the horticultural rhizome to describe social and spatial organization in the contemporary world. For Deleuze and Guattari, the rhizome is a "horizontally" oriented anti-system ("any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be") that operates in contrast

with “the tree or root, which plots a point, fixes an order.” The allusion here is both to a network, which is built to respond pragmatically to the immediate, situation-specific goals of users, and to a social world in which “official” versions of historical development cohabit with a shifting array of multivariate alternatives:

A rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles. A semiotic chain is like a tuber agglomerating very diverse acts, not only linguistic, but also perceptive, mimetic, gestural, and cognitive: there is no language in itself, nor are there any linguistic universals, only a throng of dialects, patois, slangs, and specialized languages (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 7).

Deleuze and Guattari articulate here the contours of a hybridized environment of people, spaces, movements, actions, and ideas, and it is a description that also usefully describes the aesthetic logic underpinning the hybridized visual strategy of the McDull films, which is both vivid and significantly more elaborated than that of the original comics. The filmmakers take advantage of the opportunities offered by animation as a creative form to build a “rhizomatic” series of spatial environments that complement and echo the loose, anecdotal, allusive, essayistic narrative structure of the films.

The decision in 1997 by McDull’s creators to shift from the comics page to television and movie screens was in a real sense an instance of fortuitous timing, both because Mak and Tse rightly perceived that this was a logical moment to expand the McDull media footprint, and because of concurrent transformations in the production template of commercial animation. Pixar’s success with *Toy Story* (1995) was also a significant marker of an ongoing trend in computer graphics research, which since the 1970s was substantially directed towards developing hardware and software capable of creating maximally photorealistic images, for use in both conventional animation and in the burgeoning industry of computer generated effects for conventional, live action cinema. As Lev Manovich has observed (2001: 191–192), however, the progress of this research has been uneven, in that graphics programs have proved capable of fluently simulating traditional film’s grammar and syntax, while the ability to consistently model objects and the movement of figures in an immersively illusionistic way has proved much harder to achieve.

That is, the technological and creative terrain of computer animation since the mid-1990s has continued to be mined both with opportunity and hazard. The animators and animation companies that have most successfully taken advantage of the former while avoiding the latter have been those that recognized the value of the new digital tools while also understanding their limitations. This has resulted in the development by some companies of a style that is hybrid in another way: animation that combines the graphic character of traditional hand-drawn animation with the heightened illusionistic potential of modern computer graphics (Fore 2007).³

The creators of the McDull animations chose an aggressively hybrid visual style from the beginning. The presumed logic here is that the McDull brand identity is as tied to the austere two-dimensional image developed on the comic pages as Mickey Mouse's is to his origins in Disney cartoons from the 1920s. Consequently, the McDull characters are pictured in a resolutely hand-drawn style (although, like *The Simpsons* and *South Park*, the films – with the exception of one scene in *My Life* – have been created on a computer) that preserves their familiar appearance across a variety of settings.

It is those settings, often in very specific Hong Kong places and spaces, which are visually rhizomatic, in that they are connected and uniformly recognizable but not graphically consistent. But there is a logic to this discontinuity, tied both to specific narrative elements within the films' episodic framework and to the expressive evocation of Hong Kong's built environment as a fundamental, defining element of the city's unique identity. The visual incongruities of the animations recall also the Situationist concept of psychogeography, which is more directly aligned with theories of urban design and city life than is Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome. Psychogeography was described in the mid-1950s by Guy Debord as "the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals" (Debord 2006: 8). Behind this quasi-scientific definition was an explicitly political tactic for destabilizing dominant ideas about urban design, most immediately in reference to Le Corbusier's modernist-derived plans for urban renewal in Paris. Insofar as they were dominated by a functionalist aesthetic that regarded the city as an extension of the vision of the domestic home as a "machine for living in," the Situationists regarded these plans as antithetical to the preservation of the social and cultural health of neighborhoods and the people who lived in them. As early as the 1920s, Le Corbusier had proposed a design for the city center of Paris that replaced the historical buildings along the Seine with a forest of high-rise towers, and he continued to wield policymaking influence as Paris recovered from World War II, championing the construction of ornamentation-free apartment buildings in a series of gridded neighborhoods that privileged efficiency and collective harmony over unforced spontaneity and individuality. These principles did not sit well with the Situationists and their predecessors; writing in 1948, the artist Michel Colle said, "for our intransigent rationalists, a residential building can be nothing other than the superimposition of four, ten, any number of linked machines for living in... . The ambience is overwhelming: at the end of his day, man quits his factory for working in for his factory for eating and sleeping in" (quoted in Sadler 1998: 7).

Psychogeography, by contrast, regarded the urban environment as an organic thing, a complex and utterly interconnected and interdependent array of sights, smells, tactile surfaces, and human interactions, all jumbled up within a series of vibrantly unruly spaces. As Sadler writes, "psychogeography comprehended buildings through their uses, their history, and their collective and associative generation of meaning and mood, like words in poetry; it inferred a poetic rather analytic

response to the environment.” (Sadler 1998: 160) For Debord, the individual’s awareness of the city’s potential for realizing “dreams of abundance” was fundamentally a matter of reorienting perception through reflexive and reflective (i.e., psychogeographic) wandering.

The sudden change of ambiance in a street within the space of a few meters; the evident division of a city into zones of distinct psychic atmospheres; the path of least resistance which is automatically followed in aimless strolls (and which has no relation to the physical contour of the ground); the appealing or repelling character of certain places – all this seems to be neglected In fact, the variety of possible combinations of ambiances, analogous to the blending of pure chemicals in an infinite number of mixtures, gives rise to feelings as differentiated and complex as any other form of spectacle can evoke... (Debord 2006: 10).

McDull’s producers are not Situationists, but one thematic area to which they are responding in these films is a parallel legacy of functionalist urban planning and policy in Hong Kong. In the post-World War II era, rationalist projects, including the rapid construction of serviceable but unadorned public housing with little attention paid to the continuity of existing communities or the nurturing of new ones, were undertaken initially out of a sense of urgency as the city’s population exploded. The colonial government introduced Hong Kong’s first comprehensive development plan in 1972, which resulted in plans for new towns and the construction of additional housing for poor and working-class people. Almost all of these flats were in clusters of high-rise blocks of similar appearance and layout, and insofar as these projects included amenities such as recreation areas, these too were laid out in a standard pattern regardless of geographical terrain or the relationship of the housing block to the surrounding neighborhood. Subsequent urban planning has paid lip service to quality of life issues, but in practice the prevailing strategy has involved a functionalist combination of new town development and the “redevelopment” of older and more dilapidated districts, such as Tai Kok Tsui, the home of Mrs. Mak and McDull – even as real estate prices have spiraled ever upward, squeezing more and more citizens out of the market. As we see in the films, the ongoing and seemingly never-ending process of tearing down and rebuilding a neighborhood can be socially disruptive and emotionally taxing for its residents, and Hong Kong people have long understood the cozy relationship between private real estate developers and government offices that regulate land use, a relationship that is demonstrably tilted in favor of private interest over the community’s welfare.

Consequently, Hong Kong people, especially those from the grassroots ranks of the community, often have had to struggle to build and maintain a sense of place in a physical environment that is perpetually in flux. The producers of the McDull films see the value of this struggle, identifying the collective memory of the city in part with a kind of psychogeographic ramble through particular, resonant locations and spaces that connect directly with the lives of characters in the films as well as those of viewers who recognize these iconic structures. As indicated above,

the filmmakers shift between hyperrealist and stylized visualization schemes to depict Hong Kong's urban spaces. In one of the most elaborate vignettes in *My Life as McDull*, for instance, Mrs. Mak promises her seriously ill son a vacation to the Maldives if McDull will be a good boy and diligently take his foul-tasting medicine. Inspired by this offer, McDull recovers and proceeds to call in his debt, not realizing that there is no way this struggling family can afford an expensive overseas holiday. The always-resourceful Mrs. Mak devises an absurdly elaborate alternate plan that involves convincing her slow-witted son that they are flying to a resort island in the Indian Ocean when in fact they are only riding the Peak Tram (a funicular railway that is a well-known tourist attraction) to its destination at the shopping and sight-seeing area on Victoria Peak. This epic journey is seen through the very wide eyes of the naïve young boy, and what he sees is not the characteristically photorealist image of his home neighborhood but a colorful tropical wonderland. The tram appears to take off into the stratosphere like a jumbo jet, the faux Art Deco shopping mall morphs into an underwater paradise as McDull and his mother snorkel and spear fish for lunch, and the three smokestacks of the Lamma Island power station (visible from the Peak Galleria's observation area) are magically transformed into waving palm trees.

The logic of picturing McDull's Maldives / Peak adventure in a non-naturalistic way emerges from the narrative sense of the sequence – this journey is substantially taking place in McDull's imagination, and a more fantastic, dreamlike visual style is entirely appropriate. At the same time, Peak landmarks such as the tower terminus of the tram, as well as the panoramic view of Hong Kong Island and the Kowloon peninsula are still perfectly recognizable, with the late afternoon cityscape depicted in impressionistic, painterly shades of orange and blue. Part of the point here is that the Peak tourist area is just that – it is an out-of-the-way destination for ordinary Hong Kong citizens, for whom the Peak itself as a residential area retains its longstanding aura of exclusivity and economic privilege. As a result, McDull's willful delusion takes on a sense of melancholy, as the viewer understands that he and his mother are unlikely ever to be able to afford this real estate.

The hybrid visual appearance of the Hong Kong built environment in the McDull animations is in general perfectly legible to viewers anywhere in the world. Still, the stylistic choices within individual scenes may convey an additional emotional resonance to Hong Kong viewers who are more intimately familiar with the represented spaces and places. In this way, the McDull films participate in a particular form of historical writing about Hong Kong. In an essay on these practices, Jeremy E. Taylor (2003) draws on the concept of *dizhi shuxie*, or topographical writing, introduced by Chen Dawai in another article, to describe “a specific genre of writing that focuses primarily on the city's built environment and streets for its expression” (Taylor 2003: 52). For Chen and Taylor, topographical writing can work as a useful corrective to dominant historical narratives that identify and define localities primarily or only in relation to essentialist ideas of the nation, very much including the histories of Hong Kong written by PRC scholars,

described as *aiguo shixue* or “patriotic historiography,” in the years leading up to 1997. “The point here,” argues Taylor, “is not whether Hong Kong residents are proud to claim a Chinese ancestry..., but that for PRC historiography, race provided the single most important factor through which Hong Kong’s past could be interpreted in the 1990s” (Taylor 2003: 50). Topographical writing shifts the focus of historical narration in proposing

that writing about Hong Kong’s urbanness need not be (and in many cases has not been) focused on questions of Chineseness, or on the racial ancestry of the city’s inhabitants. Instead it is in the physical shape of the city – and in the unique relationship the city’s inhabitants maintain with their urban environment that such writing finds its inspiration (Taylor 2003: 52).

The McDull films can be regarded as almost quintessential examples of topographical writing both in their local focus and in the elaborately detailed visualizations of Hong Kong locations that are connected with particular story elements. As discussed earlier, these depictions often appear to be photorealistic renderings of streets and buildings – and insofar as some of them were assembled with Photoshop and After Effects, they are. But upon closer inspection, these hyperreal images are consistently destabilized and defamiliarized through the subtle and dryly witty deployment of graphic techniques that disturb the apparent visual unity of a scene and provide a commentary on aspects of contemporary Hong Kong life familiar to Hong Kong citizens.



Figure 6.1 A topographical moment in *McDull, Prince de la bun* (Yuen Toe, 2004): As McDull and his mother walk through the Tai Kok Tsui neighborhood, a “redeveloped” housing block collapses into a cubist heap.

For example, in a brief scene early in *McDull, Prince de la Bun*, McDull and his mother are seen walking on the sidewalk on a busy street in their neighborhood, having a rather nonsensical conversation. The perspective of the shot is eye level, filmed from directly across the street; the virtual camera tracks laterally and smoothly to the left, following the characters as they move. Although the focus is on the characters, our view of them is repeatedly obscured by the dense traffic of buses, taxis, minivans, and trucks, represented as blurs speeding past the camera. In fact, the vehicles are moving much faster than would be safe in real life, where they are much more likely to be snarled in a fitfully progressing gridlock. The characters pay no attention to this accelerated version of Hong Kong's ordinary impression of relentless, often directionless dynamism – when Mrs. Mak and McDull reach and cross a busy intersection, they don't hesitate, never breaking stride as they weave among the vehicles that are also hurtling fearlessly ahead. It is also significant that the buildings lining the street behind the characters are photo-realistically rendered (in contrast to the characters themselves), which situates the action specifically in the Tai Kok Tsui area. However, at one point the characters walk by a building situated in a background plane within the frame that suddenly and unexpectedly crumbles into a cubist heap (see Figure 6.1). Although the neighborhood is described by McDull as a "redeveloping dump," our passing glimpse of the building shows no demolition team at work – it is as though urban renewal in Hong Kong works like spontaneous combustion. Also, as with the hyper-accelerated traffic, the characters pay absolutely no attention to this event, and, although a sound effect of tumbling concrete is heard on the soundtrack as the building collapses, this noise is not prominent in the overall soundscape, which emphasizes the characters' conversation and also features traffic noise and a jaunty non-diegetic Latin melody. In fact, while sharp perception is rewarded with a witty, very local visual punchline, it is easy for the casual viewer to completely miss the slightly surreal image of the imploding building. Finally, at the very end of this tracking shot, the camera cranes up and over a highway overpass, also crowded with speeding traffic, and, in a recurrent image in the McDull films, past construction cranes that swirl as though they are dancing with each other. These cranes are familiar sights throughout Hong Kong, but in these animated versions their ubiquity and kinetism are multiplied as a sly visual in-joke. Altogether, then, this 20-second scene forcefully, efficiently, and humorously establishes with utter specificity a tangible geographic and social sense of the home neighborhood of the film's central characters.

The McDull animations are powerful reservoirs of cultural memory, and they have an unorthodox relationship with memory's frequent companion, nostalgia. The word "nostalgia" was first introduced to describe medical symptoms connected with a "disorder of the imagination" (Hutcheon 1998: 3), but it has been transformed over time into a sociopolitical malady, and one with usually negative critical connotations, perhaps most influentially in Fredric Jameson's (1991) withering critique of the postmodern "nostalgia film." Nostalgic memory in

contemporary accounts is most often associated with an ahistorical romanticizing of aspects of the past, substantially triggered by dissatisfaction with the present. On the other hand, some scholars have located more positive associations in contemporary nostalgic articulations, including certain Hong Kong films. Linda Chiu-han Lai has identified in the local version of the nostalgia film a

quest for a history that has yet to be articulated... by gathering the local people before the screen, turning film viewing into a concentrated act of recalling the shared memory of a shared culture. Ritualistic commemoration emphasizes the “surface” – stock images and representational norms, and the immediate recognition of them Ritualistic commemoration is effected by what I call “solidarity through shared signs,” whereby the intentional domain of the author is bracketed to foreground signs, images, and representations as the “public medium of social being” (Lai 2001: 233).

With regard to the visual style of the McDull films, Lai’s focus on the “surface” of the films she discusses dovetails usefully with Taylor’s analysis of topographical histories of Hong Kong in that both emphasize the power of locally inflected images in the articulation of a cultural narrative that is genuinely collective and rhizomatic in its orientation. Similarly, the McDull franchise is often associated with a nostalgic perspective on Hong Kong society, but rather than a sentimental longing for an imaginary past, the films express a considerably more nuanced and hard-edged viewpoint. The most graphically (and narratively) elaborate example of this expression occurs in *McDull, Prince de la Bun*, the central episode of which concerns a long, episodic story told by Mrs. Mak to her son. As noted earlier, the story concerns the titular prince, who at the beginning of the tale is a clone of McDull, but who then magically metamorphoses into a character who seems to be his adult self. After a brief metaphorical interlude that references *The Little Prince* and depicts McDull as a fully Pixar-like three-dimensional computer animated character, the scene dissolves from the rather plasticine-appearing CGI McDull back to the 2D adult McDull, seen initially from the back and walking through a broad alley lined on both sides with stacks of photorealistically rendered steel shipping containers (a familiar sight in Hong Kong’s ports, as well as on disused land in the New Territories). The angle reverses, and the virtual camera tracks backward as the character continues to walk forward in a straight line. Suddenly, the walls of shipping containers are moved back and away from the alley by some unseen force, and the camera angle reverses again, this time to a point of view approximately that of the character as he walks. His eyes are cast to the ground, so what he’s walking toward is not in view; however, at both the left and right edge of the frame, what looks like a concrete sidewalk at a street corner glides from off-screen, as though on rollers. The character reaches the exit from the alley, and the camera, again following from behind, tilts up to reveal a mysterious street scene, shrouded in a greenish yellow haze. There are building support pillars at either corner of the alley, each with writing in Chinese. Directly ahead are

dimly seen shop fronts across what looks like a busy street. The camera angle reverses again, as we see the character gazing ahead impassively. After a brief pause, the camera tracks back and cranes all the way up to a bird's eye view from across the street, looking down on what appears to be Wanchai (the neighborhood between Central and Causeway Bay on Hong Kong Island) as it appeared in the 1960s (see Figure 6.2).⁴

The 2D pig is dwarfed in the midst of this landscape, which is expressed in the photorealistic style associated elsewhere especially with settings in Tai Kok Tsui; the effect is particularly startling here, thanks to the subtly spectacular spatial and temporal shift of the story to Hong Kong's past. Period cars, buses, and trams glide by at a speed considerably less than that described in the contemporary scene described above. There are a few pedestrians and shop keepers present, but these streets from a past decade are curiously under-populated, lending the scene a mildly uncanny, surreal sensation – the emphasis is on the built environment itself, not on the usual frenetic rhythm of Hong Kong life. The shop buildings are all no more than three stories high, and in a *tong lau* style that was once very common but has largely disappeared from Hong Kong streets. All of the buildings have upper floors (residential apartments) that protrude over the sidewalk, creating a continuous arcade supported by concrete columns. *Tong lau* was a style of vernacular architecture borrowed from southern China, with the earliest examples in



Figure 6.2 Time and space are magically compressed in this scene from *McDull, Prince de la bun* (Yuen Toe, 2004), as McDull's father emerges from an alley to find himself in a photorealistic street scene of Hong Kong in the 1960s.

Hong Kong dating from the nineteenth century. The construction of *tong lau* buildings really exploded over the first half of the twentieth century, though, as Hong Kong experienced repeated influxes of migrants from China. That is, this was a building style characteristic of working-class neighborhoods, and is a highly meaningful topographical symbol within the collective memory of Hong Kong people.

As it turns out, the long sequence that plays out in “old Hong Kong” is actually an account of Mrs. Mak’s courtship with her long-absent husband (who first seemed to be the “adult” McDull). McBing is a none-too-successful, low-skilled worker who experiences a mid-life crisis on his wedding day; as Mrs. Mak describes it in this neorealist fairy tale, her new husband abandoned her (and, apparently, their unborn son) because he was a real prince compelled to reclaim his crown. We see McBing alone in his dingy flat (also highly illusionistic – it looks like a set from an early Wong Kar-wai film), somewhat morosely contemplating his lack of prospects. While the overall tone of the sequence is steeped in melancholy, there is humor here. As the McBings walk through a crowded market and sit down to order a meal, Mrs. Mak talks rapidly and unceasingly, without saying much of anything, and right before the wedding day scene, the story cuts nonsensically back to the Springfield Kindergarten in the present day, where the principal is delivering one of his rote lessons to the children – except that the subject of his lecture is, somewhat chillingly, the need to stifle ambition and be content with just getting by, sentiments which of course apply directly to the briefly interrupted flashback.

Conclusion

Over the past decade, the unequal development of the Hong Kong and mainland China film markets have contributed to the development of an asymmetrical translocal interdependency of film industry workers, technologies, and resources. Under CEPA, the burgeoning practice of Hong Kong–China co-productions has turned out to be both an economic opportunity and a political minefield. There are restrictions on personnel and the parameters of these partnerships, as well as a strict and complicated review process from script to final cut. In this way, CEPA has been engineered according to the desires of the Chinese state, the dominant partner in co-production deals, such that the whole process contributes to the maintenance of the vertical transnational imaginary embedded in state ideology, with the relevant principles here being that Hong Kong is no more or less than a part of greater China, and that subjectivities connected to a locality are always also tied to the state as well (Oakes and Schein 2006). The state would like to make use of Hong Kong–mainland co-productions under CEPA to instill the ideology of translocalism, interpellating Hong Kong filmmakers such that they identify with

their own economic and creative interests, with Hong Kong as a cultural space, and with the legacy of the Hong Kong cinema, but also (and more so) with the larger cultural, economic, and political interests of the Chinese state and the central government.

Between 2001 and 2012, Brian Tse and Alice Mak's small, Hong Kong-based film company produced four feature-length McDull animations, each of which simultaneously has enriched and complicated the idea of "local consciousness." The trajectory has led the company from productions created entirely in Hong Kong and designed primarily for a local audience to co-productions with mainland partners; from a logistically flexible, author-centered production mode to the more rigid structures required under the co-production and state censorship regulations; and from a place-bound idea of local consciousness to a more diffuse articulation of identity increasingly less tied to a specific place, culture, or history. Some of these changes are the result of state practices and arguably have taken the McDull franchise in some uncertain directions, but at the same time Tse and Mak have devised subtle and (crucially) entertaining counter-strategies of both production and creative expression that push back against the strictures of state ideology. Through the McDull films, we can see the ways that co-production practices and policies are contributing to a redefinition of the geographical imagination of the Hong Kong people. However, the dynamics of the McDull co-productions have not led simply to renationalization or delocalization (the effacement of "Hong Kong" as a place), but rather more complexly to a disruption of place-based identity, a confusion of local boundaries, and a multiplication of horizontality and the translocal imaginary without losing sight of the importance of place-making in people's lives.

The visual style of the McDull films is conceived to favor imagery that complements the narrative trajectories of the characters and the social and cultural topics they address through their words and actions. That imagery is at times presented to the viewer in the non-realistic style of hand-drawn animation, and at others in strikingly realistic tableaux that seem to clash (from a graphic perspective) with the character animation. In both of these situations, the stylistic choice is determined by an appraisal by the animation team of what kind of visual inflection is needed to match the ideas and situations addressed in each individual scene. As Linda Lai has expressed the impact of this graphic discontinuity, "The compilation quality of recognizable street scenes, architectures, and landmarks at once signifies the urban space of Hong Kong and alienates the viewer with the unreal and the impossible, or perhaps a sense of in-betweenness at once familiar and strange." (Lai 2006: 5) For native Hong Kong viewers, this discontinuously rhizomatic "in-betweenness," which certainly carries over into the stories told and themes explored, is especially rewarding, contributing greatly to the pleasure of watching McDull, as these fanciful graphic topographies and translocal geographies of the spaces inhabited and worked in by ordinary citizens help to express what it *feels* like to live in this city.

Note

The writing of this chapter was significantly aided by the assistance of five Hong Kong filmmakers and above-the-line interviewees. Since all of them are currently working on Hong Kong–China co-productions, they are not identified by name in the text.

Notes

- 1 Note that we do not include *McDull: The Alumni* (2006) in our discussion, as this part-live action film is widely regarded as a “marking time” project produced at least partly to keep the franchise in the public eye at a time when Bliss was having difficulty arranging financing for another feature-length animation.
- 2 Additional strategies for evading Chinese censorship apparatus are currently employed by Hong Kong film producers, but we choose not to discuss them here in order to help preserve their viability.
- 3 For additional discussion of this phenomenon, see Fore (2007).
- 4 This time frame is, of course, literally nonsensical, as the young McDull is not 50 years old but a kindergarten student in twenty-first century Hong Kong. Additional details within this flashback sequence further muddy the temporal waters; for instance, a 1970s vintage poster of Cantopop star Sam Hui is seen in McBing’s flat.

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Globalizing Hong Kong Cinema Through Japan

David Desser

When Hong Kong cinema came to the attention of American and European film fans in the early 1970s, it did so, in contradistinction to virtually every other foreign film success story, not through arthouses but through mainstream commercial outlets. The astonishing commercial success of these Hong Kong films was owed to a large handful of movies which boasted a sense of familiarity to Euro-American audiences due to their liberal borrowings from Hollywood and Italian Westerns and the then-popular Blaxploitation cycle. These influences were sifted through the largely unfamiliar, but long-standing genre of the martial arts, a form that functions as something of the Chinese imaginary and which had gained a solid purchase in Hong Kong after World War II and throughout East and Southeast Asia since the middle of the 1960s. Of course, many cinemas relied on a combination of the familiar and the exotic to aid their assimilation onto foreign screens, although previous to the Hong Kong cinema none had attempted to work through commercial, even lowbrow genres to do so. In this respect it did not hurt that the films were released, without exception, dubbed into local languages. Without the patina of subtitles to create the aura of art and, of course, thus able to appeal to more general audiences, Hong Kong movies in the early to mid-1970s had little critical cachet to accompany their commercial clout. Yet this hardly mattered to Hong Kong producers and distributors, since their films were strictly commercial entertainments in the local context. No festival play for these films; they were only in it for the money – though their regional appeal in the face of competition from locally produced genre efforts speaks to their canny artistic and aesthetic attributes.

Of course a number of factors led to the overseas success of Hong Kong films in the 1970s, not least among them the films of Bruce Lee. Stardom, in general,

was certainly a factor, with a large handful of young, attractive, dynamic, skilled actors appearing in these quickly, but skillfully produced films. Yet Bruce Lee's transcendental appeal is undeniable, a once-in-a-generation phenomenon of world cinema, on a par with the likes of Charlie Chaplin, Fred Astaire, or Amitabh Bachchan. Moreover, the preponderance of these young stars was male at the very moment when Hollywood was itself in danger of becoming an all-male enclave. Thus, Bruce Lee and his cohorts fit right in to a system of stardom and genre that captured the zeitgeist.

Yet the success of Hong Kong cinema at that time was something of a long-sought breakthrough rather than a happy accident, more a study in perseverance than serendipitous happenstance. The international success meted out to Hong Kong movies at this time was nothing other than the culmination of long-held desires on the part of moviemakers in the territory, especially Run Run Shaw and the hierarchy of the Shaw Bros studio. Through efforts at regionalization in the 1950s and modernization in the 1960s, filmmakers in the territory had their eye on international acclaim in the 1960s – an acclaim that proved elusive until globalization was achieved in the 1970s through the hybridization of the martial arts cinema. The initial failure to achieve international success in the 1960s and the ultimate manner in which globalization was realized are both owed to the same set of strategies that Hong Kong producers employed. This strategy may usefully be called the “Japan Option” since their former East Asian enemy provided a number of object lessons that ultimately enabled the Hong Kong Chinese cinema to surpass their former role model in commercial success and transnational influence.

This Japan Option involved a number of both synchronous and diachronic strategies. A rough chronology would factor in Japan as a source of stories for Hong Kong filmmakers, along with specialized locations; a model of producing for the regional audience, especially with an aim on the Asian Film Festival, and the international audience, especially the Cannes Film Festival; a number of co-productions featuring Japanese or Hong Kong directors and a mixed Japanese–Hong Kong cast; Japan as a provider of personnel in the modernization process; and Japan as source of regenerating the martial arts through borrowings and remakes.

The Japanese took a course toward globalization that might seem counterintuitive, attempting first to reach global audiences (by which, inevitably, one means Euro-American ones) and then embarking on a regionalizing effort. Perhaps given the still-raw wounds of war, a Euro-American strategy of international attention might have seemed the better option, or perhaps success in the West could help open up screens in the East. In any case, the Japanese strategy of film festival distribution was a roaring success, as was entry onto American art screens. Though the success of Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon* (1950) at Venice in 1951 is virtually a cliché of film history, it was not an isolated attempt at the time, not a one-off effort. The Japanese had sent a film to Venice in both 1937 and 1938. The success of *Rashomon* at Venice and its subsequent laudatory reviews in the US led to the (Honorary) Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film. (All foreign-film

Oscar winners were honorary until 1957.) The Japanese sent eight more films to Venice from 1952 through 1957. *Ugetsu* (Kenji Mizoguchi) in 1953 and *Sansho the Bailiff* (Mizoguchi) and *Seven Samurai* (Kurosawa) in 1954 took Silver Lion awards. Though films by Mizoguchi and Kurosawa made up almost all of the submissions, Kon Ichikawa's *Harp of Burma* (1956) was an exception. It was also an exception in not being a period film (*jidai-geki*), though it was, as a story of World War II, set in the past. Significantly, *Princess Yang Kwai Fei* (1955), submitted in 1956, was among the Mizoguchi films in competition at Venice – a Chinese-set story with financial participation by the Shaw Brothers studio.

If virtually all of the films submitted to Venice were period films, the same was less true of Japanese submissions to Cannes. Though it is well known that Teinosuke Kinugasa's *Gate of Hell* (1953) took the Grand Prize at Cannes in 1954 (before the prize was called the Palme d'Or, beginning in 1955), less well known is that the Japanese had entered Kaneto Shindo's *Children of the Atom Bomb* (1952) the year before. Submissions to Cannes were less highly focused on period films, though certainly the lone Grand Prize winner, *Gate of Hell*, fell into that category. Similarly, Japan's two Oscar winners in the 1950s were period films: *Gate of Hell* and *Samurai* (Hiroshi Inagaki, 1954).

Daiei Studios had the most success in the European festivals. The positive reception of Japanese films and the resultant softening of Euro-American attitudes toward Japan partially as a result led the Japanese to look closer to home for festival distribution. In 1953, Daiei studio head Masaichi Nagata was instrumental in forming what was first called the Southeast Asian Film Festival, begun in 1954 and held in Tokyo. Unlike its more famous European counterparts, the festival would change venues each year and thus offer the host country something of a chance to show off its own cinema. When the festival was held in Hong Kong in 1956 it was billed as the Asian Film Festival; today it is the Asia-Pacific Film Festival. The festival by-laws stated that no entries into the festival should be submitted elsewhere (Yau 2003: 282). This partially accounts for the fact that the Japanese titles, winners of the Best Picture in the 1st, 2nd, and 4th Festivals, are hardly recognizable today. However, they are all essentially period films, in keeping with the Japanese tendencies toward costume dramas for festival distribution.

The dominance of Japan in the early days of the Asian Film Festival clearly encouraged MP&GI and Shaw Brothers to upgrade their films both technically and narratively in terms of story and characterization. One way they accomplished this was to make films in Japan with leading actors portraying Japanese characters. Director Evan Yang (Yi Wen) and superstar Li Lihua went to Japan in 1955 and made *Beauty of Tokyo* (1955) (co-starring Lo Wei – the director who brought Bruce Lee to global fame in the early 1970s) and *Blood Will Tell* (1955), the first major studio film from Hong Kong to use Eastmancolor. (The Japanese began to use Eastmancolor on a sporadic basis in 1952; one can easily conclude that the reception meted out to *Gate of Hell* owed much to its subtle use of a pastel palette.) In addition to Mandarin-language productions, Shaw Brothers had established its

own Cantonese film group in 1958. Its first film was made in 1959, *Desert Island Pearl*, which was shot on location in Japan.

One can detect a kind of Chinese-style Orientalism at work in the use of Japanese locations and Japanese stories. The all-Chinese cast of *Madame Butterfly* (1956), with top filmmaker Evan Yang directing Li Lihua and Huang He (as well as Lo Wei) in Japan, is typical of the exoticization of Japan for Hong Kong audiences. Studio publicity for the film prominently displays Miss Li in kimono and proudly notes interiors “decorated in pure Japanese style.” Superstar Linda Lin Dai was also featured in *Screen International* detailing “How I Learned to Act Like A Japanese Girl” for the production of *Miss Kikuko* (Yan Jun, 1956) in which she portrays a Japanese bar girl loved by a young Chinese tourist (see Figure 7.1).



Yet we may detect something more significant occurring here: testimony to a new generation of Hong Kong movie star who is capable of a kind of flexible citizenship of the sort previously perhaps only the province of imperialist nations and global cultural providers. And that is one of the keys to understanding what is at stake in Hong Kong's turn to Japan. Hollywood and Japan had often used cross-ethnic casting. (So, too, had many European nations, for that matter.) Famous American examples include *The Good Earth* (Sidney Franklin, 1937) with Paul Muni and Luise Rainer playing the Chinese farmers made famous in Pearl S. Buck's perennially popular novel; Katharine Hepburn putting on yellowface for the wartime pro-Chinese propaganda film *Dragon Seed* (Jack Conway, 1944); Peter Lorre in the B-feature "Mr. Moto" series (1937–1939); and most famous of all, the "Charlie Chan" series especially those with Warner Oland (1931–1937) and Sidney Toler (1938–1946) comprising 37 films, not including those starring other, non-Chinese actors. Interestingly, the first two actors to portray the Chinese-American detective were Japanese. But with the coming of sound, white actors took over the role.

The situation as regards the Japanese was perhaps even more problematic for Chinese audiences, since they were doubtless aware of the many propaganda films the Japanese produced in the period from 1940 to 1945. The big-budget Toho production of *The Opium War* (Masahiro Makino, 1943) featured an all-Japanese cast portraying both the heroic Chinese and the villainous British, with superstar Hideko Takamine making a seamless transition from child actor to juvenile leading lady and superstar-in-the-making Setsuko Hara as her sister. Most (in)famously, the ethnic Japanese Yoshiko Yamaguchi undertook a virtual ethnic masquerade in her guise as Li Xianglan, a beautiful Chinese nightingale, heroically demonstrating the essential goodness and righteousness of the Japanese cause. Films like *Song of the White Orchid* (Kunio Watanabe, 1939), *China Night* (Osamu Fushimizu, 1940), and *Vow in the Desert* (Kunio Watanabe, 1940) along with lesser-known films like *Suzhou Nights* (Hiromasa Nomura, 1941) and *Sayon's Bell* (Hiroshi Shimizu, 1943), in which she plays an ethnic Taiwanese maiden (but still under her guise as a Chinese actress), were enough to put her on trial after the war as a collaborator until it was learned that she was, in fact, Japanese. Though there are no examples, per se, of Hong Kong Chinese stars acting in whiteface, the ethnic masquerade as Japanese allows Hong Kong to turn the tables on its former conqueror. Like Hollywood and Japan, and Europe, for that matter, Hong Kong stars may now join the list of ethnic cross-casting, taking on an imperialist patina through the masquerade.

Here we may find that the Hong Kong–Japan co-productions, which began in 1957, can help clarify the situation. *Hong Kong Tokyo Honeymoon* (Yoshitaro Nomura, 1957) marks the first major Hong Kong–Japanese co-production which relies on a Japanese director and a Chinese and Japanese cast. Superstar Lin Dai is supported by major or upcoming Japanese stars like Keiko Kishi, Ineko Arima, and Keiji Sada. The title provides us with an appropriate metaphor, a literal linking of Hong Kong

with Tokyo / Japan on an equal basis, an assertion that Hong Kong is worthy of a marriage, a partnership, with Japan, as well as a kind of honeymoon period of pro-Japanese images in Hong Kong (something that will change by the early 1970s, when Japanese characters are frequently utilized in martial arts movies as villains). Subsequent Hong Kong productions which relied on Japanese directors further attest to a new transnationalism in Hong Kong cinema, with films like *Tokyo Hong Kong Honolulu* (Yasuki Chiba, 1963) and *A Night in Bangkok* (Yasuki Chiba, 1967) reflecting the global nature of production and distribution. These films are light romantic comedy-dramas, with location shooting in Japan, Hong Kong and in the other cities named in the aforementioned titles. All of the films revolve around the romantic entanglements of a Japanese man and a Hong Kong woman: see, especially, the Lucilla Yu Ming–Akira Takarada trilogy directed by Yasuki Chiba – *A Night in Hong Kong* (1961), *Star of Hong Kong* (1963) and *Honolulu, Tokyo, Hong Kong*. This pattern reverses the situation in which Japan found itself vis-a-vis Hollywood, during a cycle of films concerning the interracial romance of a white American man and a Japanese woman (e.g., *Teahouse of the August Moon* [Daniel Mann, 1956]; *Sayonara* [Joshua Logan, 1957], though the leading lady in the latter was a Japanese-American). Whether this is a question of the remasculinization of the Japanese man or the fact that the overwhelming majority of the audience for Hong Kong films was female and thus would have identified with Lucilla Yu Ming and her romantic entanglements, poses an interesting issue in cinematic reception. A more aggressive assertion of Hong Kong's masculinity in light of its emergence as a global economic power may be found in the Shaw Brothers' production of spy thrillers à la James Bond beginning in 1966. One such film was *Inter-pol*, directed by Ko Nakahira in 1967 under his Chinese pseudonym Yeung Shu-hei. One of the most interesting entries in this cycle was *Asia-Pol* (Akinori Matsuo, 1967), a Nikkatsu–Shaw Brothers co-production featuring Wang Yu and Ruriko Asaoka with location shooting in Hong Kong, Yokohama, and Bangkok. Kinnia Yau notes that a Japanese version was shot at the same time, which eliminated star Wang Yu in favor of a Japanese male lead. (Yau 2010: 98) Almost a dozen co-productions were made in a decade's time.

Nineteen fifty-eight saw the first Hong Kong film win Best Picture at the Asian Film Festival. Doe Ching's *Our Sister Hedy* was a bright, smart, Hollywood-inflected film, typical of the emerging style of MP&GI. A modern story, as so many of the studio's films were in its heyday, it seemed to go against the grain of the Japanese model of period films made for festival entry. In fact, this would be the only time the studio would win Best Picture at the Asian Festival, while it never had a film in competition or otherwise screened in the major European festivals. Though it entered films previously in the Asian Film Festival (Lin Dai winning the Best Actress Award the year previously for *Golden Lotus*) and took the occasional acting, writing or technical prize until 1964, it obviously was content primarily to appeal to sophisticated middle-class audiences in Hong Kong. Shaw Brothers, however, was more hungry for regional and international recognition.

Shaw Brothers began its march toward globalization by inviting the Japanese cinematographer Tadashi Nishimoto to Hong Kong in 1957 where he helped introduce the use of Eastmancolor to the studio with *Love with an Alien* (1958; officially a Korean co-production). Japanese director Mitsuo Wakasugi came with Nishimoto and is listed as one of the directors on the film. Due to Korean restrictions against Japanese cultural products, both Nishimoto and Wakasugi were given Chinese pseudonyms (Yau 2010: 89). In fact, for the over three dozen films Nishimoto shot in Hong Kong, he was listed as He (or Ho) Lan-Shan. Nishimoto's impact on Hong Kong cinema is impossible to overstate. As Shaw Brothers came increasingly to rely on big-budget costume epics filmed in Eastmancolor and CinemaScope (adapted into Shawscope) both to compete with MP&GI and Cantonese filmmaking in Hong Kong and for festival prizes abroad, Nishimoto's presence was central.

After the triumph of MP&GI at the 5th Asian Film Festival, Shaw Brothers' efforts to modernize were amply rewarded the following year when *The Kingdom and the Beauty* (Li Hanxiang, 1962) took the top prize. A costume epic filmed in Eastmancolor, Li's film set the course for his unprecedented success over the next few years, until he set up his own studio in Taiwan in 1963. Even after his (temporary) departure from the studio, Shaw Brothers continued to produce films in his mold – many photographed by Tadashi Nishimoto. Shaw Brothers' and Li's success in the 6th Asian Film Festival was matched in the 7th, held in Tokyo in 1960, where *Rear Entrance* (a.k.a. *Back Door*) (Li Hanxiang, 1960) took the Best Picture prize. This would be the only modern story with which Shaw Brothers and Li would succeed overseas.

Emboldened by success with a costume film in the 1959 Asian Film Festival, Shaw Brothers took a page from Japan and sent period spectacles to Cannes, though not at all to Venice. And much as Mizoguchi became the go-to director for the Japanese in Venice, Li Hanxiang became Hong Kong's representative to the French Riviera. *The Enchanting Shadow* in 1960; *Yang Kwei Fei* (a.k.a. *The Magnificent Concubine*) in 1962 – accepted into the Palme d'Or competition and winner of a Technical Grand Prize Special Mention, fittingly enough due to the cinematography of Tadashi Nishimoto; and *Empress Wu Tse-tien* (Li Hanxiang, 1963) in 1963 marked a mini-flood of Hong Kong films. Winning no major awards during this time, however, Hong Kong abandoned European festivals for more than a decade.

Instead, Shaw Brothers took another tack, attempting to enter the US market directly, without festival fanfare as the Japanese had relied on, via a series screened at Manhattan's 55th Street Playhouse. Frank Lee, Shaw Brothers' US distributor, booked the films into the rather small (253-seat) theater with an eye toward further US play-dates depending on the local reception. Alas, this was both the beginning and end of the line. Sending some of their top costume dramas to New York, the films were pilloried in the *New York Times*. Of the first film in the series, *Last Woman of Shang* (Yueh Feng, 1964), Bosley Crowther claimed it had "as much

dramatic form and pace as a third-rate Italian muscle-opera" (Crowther 1964). Of *The Love Eterne* (Li Hanxiang, 1963) – which had won a number of technical awards at the Asian Film Festival in 1963, including Best Color Cinematography for Tadashi Nishimoto, and which went on to become Hong Kong's biggest commercial hit up to that time, both domestically and regionally – the *Times* was no less cruel. Remarking that the title was all-too-apt, "it runs on and on – it seems forever," Crowther felt that the whole thing was "tedious." He did, however, feel that the film was beautifully photographed "in a quality of color that our best Hollywood films seldom match" (Crowther 1965). Things did not improve much for reviews meted out to *Empress Wu Tse-tien*, *The Lady General* (Yueh Feng, 1964) or *The Grand Substitution* (Yan Jun, 1965) throughout the rest of 1965.

By the middle of the 1960s, it was abundantly clear that Shaw Brothers had won the competition with MP&GI for domestic and regional audiences. The modernization project undertaken by Shaw Brothers as early as the middle 1950s in order eventually to achieve a stronger regional and global presence included construction of Shaw Movie Town in Clearwater Bay, Kowloon, completed in 1958. This gave Shaw Brothers the largest studio complex in Asia. They also virtually abandoned black and white cinematography and shot all of their films in CinemaScope, as well. This not only served to separate their product from the vastly under-capitalized Cantonese cinema, but also spoke of modernity and Westernization, particularly in a period when European cinema was still dominated by black and white. Thus by the end of the 1960s, Shaw Brothers truly became the Hollywood of the East, a throwback in production efficiency, star power and audience appeal to the Golden Age of Hollywood.

Still, their disappointment with their forays into the European festival circuit and the US art-film market led to an even stronger reliance on Japan, this time through the importation of a number of Japanese film talents. For Kinnia Yau, the influx of Japanese directors in the mid-1960s was something of a "Japan Whirlwind" and their primary purpose was to inject a "feel for the era and a sense of youth in their pictures." (Yau 2000: 108) Umetsugu Inoue, the most successful of these imported talents, himself understood the he and his fellow countrymen were hired in order to raise efficiency, decrease costs and enrich content. D.W. Davis and Emilie Yeh Yueh-yu note that while there was an element of prestige attached to the hiring of Japanese directors, it was, as Inoue indicated, efficient craftsmanship that Shaw Brothers were after. (Davis and Yeh 2003: 257) In addition, they too believe along with Yau that the "sense of youth" was a Japanese specialty and could update Shaw Brothers' stodgy, aging melodramas. "Inoue's youth-oriented stories of sexual yearning and bohemian energy were a step away from Shaw Brothers' traditional forte, as well as the more strait-laced family melodramas of MP&GI [Cathay], aimed directly at women viewers." (Davis and Yeh 2003: 264)

The female dominance of Hong Kong Mandarin cinema was coming to an end, both at MP&GI (which itself would not survive past the end of the 1960s) and at

Shaw Brothers. The suicide of major stars like Lin Dai in 1964 and Betty Loh Tih (Le Di) in 1968 along with the retirement of Grace Chang and Lucilla Yu Ming in 1964 and Julie Yeh Feng in 1969 certainly took away five of the brightest lights ever to shine in the Hong Kong cinema firmament. At the same time Shaw Brothers was realizing that young male stars had more appeal to the increasingly youthful demographic of Hong Kong, especially as the previously reliable female audience began to abandon the cinema for television. Both Umetsugu Inoue and Ko Nakahira had worked at Nikkatsu during that studio's revolutionary shift to male-dominated youth films. Overall, Shaw Brothers brought six directors over from Japan to work on Hong Kong films beginning in 1967. None, however, would actually work on the films that globalized Hong Kong cinema: martial arts. Yet Japan was central to that process.

By the early 1960s, Japanese samurai, or *chambara*, films became hugely popular in Japan as well as in Hong Kong. Kurosawa's *Yojimbo* (Akira Kurosawa, 1961) and *Sanjuro* (Akira Kurosawa, 1962) and the series beginning in 1962 featuring Shintaro Katsu as the blind swordsman Zatoichi revolutionized the form in Japan, translating historical costume epics with relatively little sword fighting (*Seven Samurai*, 1954, being something of an exception) into action-packed, cinemascope mayhem. Critics have noted the number of Japanese films restructured to fit a Chinese pattern. Yau points out that *Paid with Blood* (Kim Lung, 1970) and *The Deaf and Mute Heroine* (Ma Wu, 1971) were two examples of films influenced directly by the Zatoichi series. (Yau 2006: 43) It might be argued that the idea of a physically challenged hero first extended to the character of the One-Armed Swordsman played by Wang Yu in Chang Cheh's hugely influential film of 1967. In tribute to this sort of influence, *Zatoichi Meets His Equal* (Kimiyooshi Yasuda, 1971) was a Hong Kong-Japanese co-production in 1971 in which the blind swordsman and the one-armed swordsman must tragically, climactically duel. Yau also notes that ingénue actress Fung Bo-bo appeared in a series of films clearly influenced by *chambara* when she was featured as a (male) samurai in films such as *The White Dragon* (Wong Fung, 1968), *The Little Warrior* (Lee Tit, 1969) and *Three Encounters* (Richard Yeung Kuen, 1969). (Yau 2006: 41) She attributes this casting to a compromise between the traditional martial arts world of Japan and China: "[A] samurai was supposed to be a male... but on the other hand, a fantasy of 'strong and beautiful teenage girls' had existed among the Chinese scholars and novelists" (Yau: 2006: 41). To be sure, the gender neutrality of Fung, where the young actress is playing a male, has a long tradition in Chinese theatre and cinema. Such was the case, too, in Japan where, for instance, famed superstar *enka* singer Hibari Misora had played a heroic young (male) samurai warrior in numerous films in the mid-1950s, especially those devoted to Japan's Robin Hood-like figure, Shimizu no Jirocho.

Ironically, however, Shaw Brothers did not need to abandon their bread-and-butter period pieces and opera-derived aesthetics, at least not entirely. For by combining some of the dynamism and masculinism of the Japanese *chambara* with its already-familiar sets, props, and costumes, Shaw Brothers in fact began

the production of films that would both completely overwhelm MP&GI / Cathay pictures and lead to a global presence. This process was put in place in 1966 with the production of *Come Drink with Me* (King Hu, 1966) and *The Magnificent Trio* (Chang Cheh, 1966). While the former film is by now well-known, being the product of the well-studied and prized legacy of King Hu (with cinematography by Tadashi Nishimoto), the latter is less discussed in favor of Chang Cheh's later *One-Armed Swordsman* (1967). In fact, *The Magnificent Trio* contains almost all of the elements that would come to dominate the New Style *wuxia pian*, and the majority of these elements derive explicitly from a Japanese film.

Hideo Gosha made his feature film debut in 1964 with *Sambiki no samurai* / *Three Outlaw Samurai*, produced by Shochiku to some success, leading to an influential career for the director who died in 1992. Influenced by the aesthetics and themes of Kurosawa's *Yojimbo* (with a title obviously derived from *Shichinin no samurai* / *Seven Samurai*), *Three Outlaw Samurai* is a fairly nihilistic film focusing on governmental corruption in an amoral world. The only transcendent value is male camaraderie and the spirit of martial adventure. Such a film might not seem particularly appropriate for the female-dominated roster of the Shaw Brothers or their conservative themes. In addition, the Japanese film features a number of fight sequences and all of the heroics essentially belong to the men. Shaw Brothers attempted something of a compromise for the remake, entitled *The Magnificent Trio*. To fashion the Chinese title to take advantage of an intertextual reference to the Japanese film, Shaw Brothers drew on the Japanese title of "three" (*san*) for the Chinese title (*Biancheng san xia*). For the English title, Shaw Brothers made reference to the original English title for *Seven Samurai*, which was released in 1956 in a shortened version as *The Magnificent Seven*, and which was, in turn, adopted by the famed Hollywood remake in 1960.

In adapting a Japanese film for their particular needs, they selected essentially the only *chambara* that featured a substantial cast of women. The singular unimportance of women in *chambara* is notable, where no more than one significant female character is typically found; *Three Outlaw Samurai* has three. Thus Shaw Brothers made room for three of the studio's top female contract players: Chin Ping, Margaret Tu Chuan, and Fanny Fan Lai. In typical Shaw Brothers fashion, it was able to use these contract players in film after film. With the exception of Fanny Fan, the entire star cast of *The Magnificent Trio* is a re-teaming of Chang's cast for *Tiger Boy* (1966; released nine months prior to *The Magnificent Trio*, and rather unusually, shot in black and white) with Jimmy Wang Yu, Lo Lieh, and Cheng Li now making up the magnificent trio of this new film. Shifting and transforming much of the political and nihilistic dimensions of the Japanese film while still clearly highlighting the values of male bonding and friendship, *The Magnificent Trio* is a nearly exact remake of the Japanese original, and is, more importantly, the clear and direct precursor for the even more violent and male-centered films that would make Chang Cheh the most influential and popular director of the Hong Kong cinema for the next half-decade.

Three Outlaw Samurai tells the story of a wandering swordsman (*ronin*), Sakon Shiba, who happens upon a mill where three farmers are holding a magistrate's daughter hostage in exchange for tax relief. He decides to help them, initially, it seems, for lack of anything better to do, but soon he is firmly on the farmers' side. He is eventually joined by another *ronin*, Sakura, who was initially hired by the magistrate to help free his daughter, but who quickly changes his allegiance upon meeting Shiba. Finally, the third outlaw samurai joins them in the form of Kikyo, at the start of the film the magistrate's best swordsman and chief bodyguard. He, too, changes his allegiance out of respect for Shiba.

The film relies on a specific visual motif – a hairpin – to start and end the film; it is also exchanged between Shiba and the magistrate's daughter on two occasions. Shiba finds the hairpin on the ground at the film's start and it is what leads him to the mill. At film's end, he tosses the hairpin in the air and he and his two companions set off in the direction that it points. This is a visual motif taken from *Yojimbo*, where the eponymous hero tosses a stick in the air at film's start and then again at its finish to point him in a new direction when it lands (see Figure 7.2).

Another important object that acts as a unifying element across the narrative is a petition written by the farmers which they intend to present to the clan daimyo (feudal lord). The magistrate sends mercenaries to kill the farmers and get the petition after his daughter is freed. Instead, Gosaku, the farmer's elder, sends the petition down the river before he dies. It finds its way back to Shiba, who later tries to convince other farmers to present it to the lord. None will.



Figure 7.2 An expensive hairpin becomes the agent of fate that sets the action in motion in Hideo Gosha's *Three Outlaw Samurai* (1964).

Each of the samurai is given a romantic interest: Aya falls in love with Shiba, Kikyo is involved from the start with an innkeeper, O-Maki, and Sakura is attracted to O-Ine, whose husband he casually killed when he mistook him for a robber. In addition, two other women play important structural roles in the film: Gosaku's daughter is taken early in the film in an attempt to exchange her for the magistrate's daughter. Instead, she kills herself rather than allow the exchange to take place. Similarly, Jinbei's daughter, who works in the magistrate's household, is instrumental in Shiba's later escape, dying in the process. Perhaps needless to say, none of the romantic attachments come to fruition. O-Maki is killed, while Shiba and Sakura abandon their potential lovers in favor of a life of companionable wandering.

The Magnificent Trio tells exactly this story as wandering swordsman Lu Fang spots a hairpin on the ground, which leads him to a mill where three villagers have taken the magistrate's daughter hostage (see Figure 7.3).

The villagers are holding her hostage to convince the magistrate to follow the government's orders to eliminate their taxes. They, too, have a petition they intend to give to the minister when he passes by the town. Lu sides with the villagers immediately and is later joined by Huang Liang, who knows him already from a recently completed battle and successful run of an enemy blockade. Eventually, the magistrate's hired swordsman, Yan Ziqing, joins up to form the magnificent trio of the title.

By the same token, all three swordsmen have romantic interludes: the magistrate's daughter falls in love with Lu, Huang Liang falls for the woman whose husband he casually killed before joining the farmers' cause, and Yan is involved with an innkeeper, Xiao Qing, who is killed by the magistrate's men, just as is O-Maki in the Japanese original. Moreover, two of the villagers' daughters sacrifice their lives for the cause: Gao's daughter kills herself rather than allow her father to trade her for the magistrate's daughter, while Ling-long, daughter of villager Li Juren, dies in the successful escape attempt of Lu.



Figure 7.3 The hairpin motif is repeated in Chang Cheh's *The Magnificent Trio* almost exactly as it is used in the Japanese original (1966).

The hairpin motif works the same way in this film to set the plot in motion and to act as an exchange on two occasions between Lu and the magistrate's daughter. The Chinese version, however, does not use the hairpin to end the film – something discussed below. The use of the petition, too, is the same: the farmers are killed after Lu's imprisonment, but Gao manages to send it downriver where it eventually finds its way back to Lu. Here, again, however, the fate of the petition differs from the Japanese original.

Both films go to great lengths to demonstrate the sensitivity of their lead protagonist, who sympathizes with the farmers in their poverty and mistreatment. One particular scene poignantly recurs in both films. Shiba notices that the farmers are giving him the last of their food. He is outraged, then, when the magistrate's daughter haughtily disdains this meal. He berates her for insensitivity and ignorance, forcing her to eat some of the food while lecturing her on what it means to be poor and oppressed. This same scene is reproduced in the Chinese version, where it is even more overtly didactic.

Although as we have seen, the Hong Kong cinema had, by 1966, a long-standing concern with Japan and Japanese cinema, the turn to it as a model for their *wuxia* films and the development of what has come to be known as New Style *wuxia pian* also had a certain immediacy. Law Kar notes that the first of the Zatoichi films to be released in Hong Kong was actually the ninth of the series, released in 1965 with the Chinese title "Zatoichi Listens with Sword." (Law 2003: 143) *Three Outlaw Samurai* appeared in Hong Kong at this same time. That both *Come Drink With Me* and the remake version of *Three Outlaw Samurai* in the form of *The Magnificent Trio* appear shortly thereafter bespeak of the almost immediate response on the part of Hong Kong cinema to the impact of Japanese swordplay movies. Moreover, and this would prove prophetic indeed for Hong Kong's eventual global reach, both studio executive Raymond Chow and director Chang Cheh suggested that Shaw Brothers should go down the road of action films as such films were the world trend at the time. (Law 2003: 131)

That Chang Cheh's *The Magnificent Trio* owes virtually all of its thematic characteristics to Hideo Gosha's *Three Outlaw Samurai* should in no way disgrace Chang's singular contribution to the growth and development of a unique Hong Kong cinema. To begin with, there are differences between the films that are not simply cosmetic. The use of black and white CinemaScope for the Japanese film was in keeping with an overall tendency on the part of serious filmmakers working in the swordplay genre to distinguish their efforts from more obviously exploitation fare. Kurosawa's *Yojimbo* and *Sanjuro* at Toho Studios and Masaki Kobayashi's *Seppuku* (1962) at Shochiku were made in the widescreen format featuring black and white film stock in an effort to insist on the serious and artistic nature of the films. As late as 1966, important *chambara* continued to rely on black and white cinematography in the CinemaScope format (e.g. Kihachi Okamoto's *Sword of Doom*, 1966). But for the Shaw Brothers, color was a sign of modernization and their effort to convert to Eastmancolor in 1958, as noted

above, was one important manifestation of this. The studio's use of color was also a sign of prestige and high production values, especially when compared to the Cantonese cinema of the period. Producing *The Magnificent Trio* in color was in some ways a given. The particular qualities of color cinematography also helped define the Shaw Brothers' house style. Its magnificent Movie Town studios gave the films the opportunity to rely on standing sets (a weakness as well as a strength) painted in traditional styles and colors, which leant the films a certain specific "Chineseness" – a lush quality quite at odds with the strain of simplicity and poverty that are aspects of traditional Japanese Zen-inspired aesthetics, captured through the high-contrast black and white photography favored by the Japanese.

The notion of a kind of lush elegance extends to the costumes, too – another sign of Shaws' high production values. The Japanese original insists on the grittiness of the topic. Wandering swordsmen are unlikely to boast the cleanliness of house samurai. Unkempt, overgrown hair, filthy sandals, the occasional scratching of the face (made famous by Toshiro Mifune in *Yojimbo*) is a sign of the samurai's fallen status, his being a *ronin*. There is no exact equivalent in the Chinese *wuxia* for the Japanese *ronin*; a tradition of wandering knight-errantry in Chinese literature allows for the more graceful appearance and higher status of the swordsman, reflected in the hair neatly piled on his head, the light, silken clothes, and fancy boots.

As it happens, however, Lu Fang is not simply a wandering swordsman, but a famous general recently returned from a disastrous battle against Qing forces. His return to the area heralds the restoration of official authority, imaged by the presence of Minister Yuan. Unlike the daimyo of the Japanese film, who never learns of the magistrate's perfidy, the farmers in the Chinese version present their petition to the minister and the magistrate is punished by ministerial decree. That is, the villagers pursue a successful course of action, even at the cost of numerous deaths – which in this case includes that of one of the magnificent trio: Huang Liang. This is in stark contrast to the nihilistic tone of the Japanese original, where the farmers' deaths and the deaths of the clan swordsmen sent to intercept the petition before it reaches the daimyo, have all been for naught. Not one of the farmers at film's end is willing to approach the lord's caravan to present the petition. This nihilism is highlighted, then, precisely by the use of the hairpin to determine the direction in which the three outlaw samurai will wander: sheer chance will guide their footsteps, just as sheer chance brought them together in the first place. No political or social good has been accomplished in this film, compared to the triumph of the law and the rule of right in the Chinese version. This insistence on the rule of law, the triumph of the just, the redemption of the sacrifices made by others, is certainly one of the major ways that the film distinguishes itself as "Chinese." And although all through the film character motivations revolve around moral responsibility, good citizenship, and other Confucian values, this Chineseness comes through most clearly in the closing sequences.

Three Outlaw Samurai relies on a pretty clear three-act structure. Act 1, which takes up 41 minutes of running time, extends from the opening scene through the release of Aya and Shiba's willing capture by the magistrate. Act 2 takes up 26 minutes of screen time and concludes as Shiba is freed from the magistrate's jail. Act 3 begins with Shiba and Sakura back at the mill and then proceeds to its conclusion with the climactic fight scene and denouement of the three swordsmen taking to the path of chance. Similarly, *The Magnificent Trio* relies on this same three-act structure, with its first act ending at the 44:30 mark of the film (almost the same running time for the first act as the Japanese original). In fact, the Chinese film marks this ending of the first act quite dramatically, as Lu Fang is marched away in a virtual procession, accompanied by martial music. Act 2 finds Lu Fang in the jail being beaten, as in the original, and similarly concludes with Lu's successful escape. This act occupies 26 minutes of running time, oddly enough, exactly the same as the Japanese original. Act 3, then, leads to the climactic battle and denouement.

The Chinese film is actually longer than the Japanese original and we can see now that it is because the third act is quite a bit more complex. This is to allow all the story lines and thematic motifs to be drawn to a final conclusion revolving around the restitution of social justice and the just deserts of all the parties. Though Huang Liang dies, it is the woman who loved him who presents the petition to the minister. Her husband died and then so did her new protector, but she proves herself worthy of their memory in her bravery and forthrightness. When the minister learns of the magistrate's evil deeds, he sentences him to summary execution. Thus, justice has been restored on the larger scale. To atone for her father's bad behavior, daughter Wen-zhen becomes a Buddhist nun – seen at film's end dressed in a nun's white hood and robes praying at her father's tomb. This is justice on the small scale on two levels: she observes filial piety in praying for her father, but she must pay for his evil-doing by sacrificing her physical comforts – perhaps recalling the scenes at the mill when she disdained the meager offerings of the farmers. Lu Fang, meanwhile, has his title of "General" restored to him and he leads the minister's troops out of town at film's end as the remaining characters look off: Wen-zhen from her father's grave, the widow not at her husband's grave, but that of Huang Liang, while Yan Ziqing makes ready to journey elsewhere.

This is all part of the film's overall pattern to establish the legitimacy of Lu Fang as an arbiter of social justice. He is almost immediately recognized as the famous general who broke through the Qing's battle-lines to make his way back, and there is always the sense that he is working to restore the social order broken by the minister's absence and the fighting against the Qing. His siding with the villagers and his moral pronouncements, then, emanate not from a wandering *ronin* with a keen sense of personal right and wrong, but from someone imbued with state authority. His constant efforts to do the right thing represent the true moral authority which resides in some outside force, a force awaiting restoration. And, indeed, it so happens: unlike in the Japanese film, where the *daimyo* is never seen and who represents a kind of immanent authority that never materializes, the

minister appears to settle things himself and restore not only social justice, but the rights and status of the wandering hero, Lu Fang. The nihilistic ending of the Japanese film, then, leaves us with a sense that there is no higher authority; that looking for such a thing only leads to betrayal or weakness. The right, the good, comes from within, and the only transcendent values are friendship, loyalty, and male camaraderie. The Chinese film picks up on those values, to be sure, but places them in this film within State-authorized justice. As Chang Cheh's career proceeds his model of stories featuring wandering swordsmen who find transcendent values not in State-sponsored authority, but in male bonding, loyalty and brotherhood comes even closer to the Japanese model that so clearly influenced this, his first major film.

Ironically, given the import of Japan and the close cinematic relations that were fostered, the films that would eventually mark Hong Kong's global impact feature stereotypical, dastardly Japanese villains who could have stepped right out of a Hollywood World War II combat film. Both *Five Fingers of Death* (Chung Chang-hwa, 1972; 1973) and *Fist of Fury* (Lo Wei, 1972; 1973), one from Shaw Brothers, the other from the newly established Golden Harvest, would take the world of genre cinema by storm and would, in their similar ways, feature upstanding, stalwart Chinese martial heroes opposed to the cruelty and inhumanity of Japanese fighters. The journey from *The Magnificent Trio* to the magnificent Bruce Lee was the culmination of the masculinism borrowed from Japan and then later turned against them. How much of the Japanese presence in these films accounts for their global popularity is debatable. Not debatable is the manner in which Japan underscored Hong Kong's rise to global cinematic success less than two decades after their march to international recognition began.

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Creative Cinematic Geographies Through the Hong Kong International Film Festival

Cindy Hing-yuk Wong

The Hong Kong International Film Festival (HKIFF) is one of Asia's most reputable platforms for filmmakers, film professionals and filmgoers from all over the world to launch new works and experience outstanding films. Screening over 330 titles from more than 50 countries in 12 major cultural venues across the territory, the Festival is Hong Kong's largest cultural event that reaches an audience of over 600,000 including 5,000 business executives who attend Hong Kong Film and Television Market (FILMART), a concurrent event of the HKIFF. Committed to discovering new talent, the Festival premieres the breadth of Chinese cinema and showcases Asian talents. As a lifestyle event, festival-goers can enjoy world-class films, attend seminars hosted by leading filmmakers from around the world, visit film exhibitions, join celebration parties, and more. (HKIFF Official Website 2012)

A major film festival, in the words of Cannes' long-time director Gilles Jacob, serves "to take the pulse of world cinema once a year" (as cited in Wong 2011: 1). That is, the festival program – selections, order, participants, and eventscapes – maps developments and connections for filmmakers and filmgoers, while sharing aesthetic and other discourses and an inclusive global gaze, especially in the case of Cannes and other A-list festivals. Yet, while film festivals map the world, maps remain ideological documents – making weighted statements about landmarks, directions, and taste. Hence, analysis of the mapping of global cinema through such terms as East / West or North / South (underpinned by negotiation of the local and global) provides critical insights into the evolving worlds of Hong Kong film and the changing position of its festival within global cinematic flows.

Few people have seen the HKIFF as an "alternative" film festival, given the overwhelming commercial climate in Hong Kong, from its colonial foundation to

the present. Nonetheless, the long-time director of the festival, Li Cheuk-to, sees it as a democratic force, liberating film from the hegemony of commercial and political systems of distribution. He is proud that the principle of “*jian shou bing xu*” (兼收並蓄) or “embracing diversity” has been the motto of the festival.¹ Any reading of the world of cinema through the diverse, oppositional, and sometimes crowd-pleasing movies of the HKIFF must grapple with these claims of inclusive global vision as well as selections, specializations, and omissions that mirror the complex position of Hong Kong, its film industry, and its citizenry.

Even on the festival website, cited above, the HKIFF maps dual functions that reflect – or perhaps invert – Hong Kong’s historical role as a meeting place of East and West. The festival in its role as regional cinematic ambassador offers a platform that “premieres the breadth of Chinese cinema and showcases Asian talents.” This exercise in creative geopolitics conceals decades of sometimes acrimonious debate over what “China” is, much less how colonial Hong Kong and the SAR relate to Asia. Even today, the relations between China and Hong Kong continue to be negotiated in the streets, businesses, and malls of the city.

This door swings both ways, of course. Here, the HKIFF website notes “as a lifestyle event, festival-goers can enjoy world-class films.” The very idea of “lifestyle event” suggests a local population of high cultural capital, presumably comprising cosmopolitan local Chinese and other viewers who come to the festival for the experience of films rather than their marketing. Attending the festival sets the audience apart from merely watching films in local venues and formats, giving the festival its share of cosmopolitan cultural capital. The festival also defines its multifaceted showcase by the embracing ideal of “world-class films”: a placeless reward of excellence that subsumes local production.

Indeed, while this category certainly includes Asian premieres, “world-class” as a term is worth exploring within a festival – and a global festival network – that has challenged and privileged not only “the West,” but “*un certain ouest*,” as defined by the filmic authority of continental auteurs in relation to Hollywood, European, and international art films over Hollywood and other mainstream cinema. Through an examination of programming and culture of HKIFF, I suggest that “world-class” here, while obviously moving beyond the West, nonetheless embodies a structurally European gaze embedded in the film festival network of which HKIFF is a competitive element. In this system, global cinema from all areas filters through the European A-level film festival circuit. This process, in turn, has shaped nearly five decades of HKIFF development, especially from the festival’s origins amid the divisions of the colonial city (Wong 2011).

Even so, any HKIFF catalog mapping omits much of the world. Latin American filmmakers have achieved scant representation among the HKIFF masters; Argentine and Chilean cinema provided films for the 2011 selection, but the total Latin American representation remained less than ten amongst over 300 films. The 2011 honor roll included only two filmmakers from Africa, a paucity characterizing many global festivals. One of these films, moreover, was *A Screaming Man* (2010) by

Chadian Mahamat-Saleh Haroun, the Cannes Jury Prize winner of the previous year, a French-financed and European-endorsed African film. This imbalance raises yet another mapping question – the contrast of global North and South – in the filmmaking and festival world. Latin American and African nations, like many Asian states, have had impoverished film industries who are also latecomers to cinematic worlds dominated by Hollywood, Bollywood, European traditions, and Chinese film industries. The use of North and South to characterize economically developed nations (North) and less-developed ones has slid over into film discourse and practice.

Through decades of growth and debate, HKIFF has showcased Chinese and Asian filmmaking, including Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the mainland as well as Japan and South Korea. These are also products, I would argue, of industries at the same time both the East and the North – films representing strong industries and shared through global distributions, involving local masters and newcomers. These films also identify an intimate core region, larger than a single contemporary nation-state, for which Hong Kong attempts to act as node, on and off screen. In the last decade, the HKIFF also has taken on a role as promoter of smaller Asian film industries not only through its programming but also through co-production for a, middleman roles and global awards. In these strategies, it competes as well as collaborates with festivals like Rotterdam, Berlin, Cannes, and Busan. Hence, HKIFF mappings today cannot be understood without events resonate with co-curricular fora like HAF (Asian Film Financing Forum) and AFA (Asian Film Awards) that involve larger albeit subordinate concepts of Asia.

Within this Asian region, HKIFF's position also entails competition. Today, the festival's main competitor is Busan, although HKIFF has competed successfully with Manila, Singapore, Bangkok, and other regional festivals for programming and position. Indeed, the HKIFF as agent, producer for a larger and wider network of Asian filmmakers with less industrial and distributive base, echoes the city's earlier commercial networks and provision of Chinese languages films to *nanyang* (南洋), the realms of the South China Seas and distribution of products in turn to Asians abroad. In this sense, the HKIFF acts not only as the Western gateway for the East, but also as northernmost point of the (Asian) South and regional center for wider and less than cogent fostering of the Asian century.

The above initial demarcations of East, West, North, and South clearly expose their constructed nature. These seemingly geographical terms have no concrete topographic boundaries; their meanings vary and oftentimes depend upon other political and social conditions as well as readings. Yet their influence and ease of legitimacy also make these words "real." Few would argue that Europe is West and Asia is East, even if geographers might underscore that their peoples constitute one continent with millennia of intersections and fluid boundaries or debate the placement of Turkey, Iran, or Australia. Yet this chapter explores further how the people, publications and audiences of the HKIFF construct and use these geographical markers and how others also employ these concepts to define and

approach the festival (and Hong Kong film). Indeed, this perspective evokes connections beyond wealth and geographic locations, such as values. Film festivals, for example, often embrace issues such as human rights, gender and sexuality, treatments of religious freedom, and self-determination, even when facing local oppositions. These issues are not “Western” per se; however, they are identified with liberal traditions that took public shape in “the West” – however contested they may be – and where “the West,” at this moment, retains a comparatively more open environment for discussion, especially if the issues can be portrayed as “external” to the Western world. That is, a Hong Kong screening of a Filipino film about sex trafficking may not involve Western voices, technicians, or even capital but nonetheless converges with Western dominated campaigns and perspectives. Indeed, Western capitalization if not control, permeates these films and their public spheres, including festivals and other concerned audiences. HKIFF sponsorship and selection transforms the meaning of films in the North and South in interesting ways by championing outsider voices in the South. Yet, we must ask where this concern “situates” Hong Kong in socio-cultural as well as filmic space.

This chapter begins with the early history of HKIFF as window to / for “the West” in the colonial city, although global Chinese played important managerial roles from the beginning. From this, it turns from the West to the HKIFF construction of the East, especially in terms of how it has been a center for China and Chinese films, local and global. Finally, it recasts North / South with particular attention to the rise of the HKIFF as co-producer, marketer, jury, and competitor within Asia. This analysis shows that HKIFF maps of the world are not idle cartographies, but complex discourses of power, shaping film, film industries, viewers, and film knowledge.

Viewing the West in the East

Since its origins, the HKIFF has been dominated by the geographies of East as has the imagined geography of the city itself. As an English colony but a Chinese city in population and culture, film emerged as bifurcated pleasure. Chinese films and venues catered to more than 90 percent of the urban population in theaters across the territory claimed by space, decorum, and food for a local population (Wong and McDonogh 2001a). The more centrally located, better-equipped movie palaces screened Western (that is, British and Hollywood films) for hybrid audiences of expatriates and local Chinese who favored such Western products. The government intervened by both direct censorship and promotion of British films within this milieu, although political elites and mass media were thrilled by Hollywood attention to the colony in making *Love is a Many-Splendored Thing* (Henry King, 1955) and *The World of Suzie Wong* (Ray Stark, 1961) (Wong and McDonogh 2001b).

The film festival itself originated in the 1970s primarily through a Hong Kong Chinese desire to expand the boundaries of the cinematic West through films previously only available in Hong Kong through special events or clubs. University-educated, mostly bilingual Chinese negotiated with the cultural services of the colonial government to go beyond Hollywood film and to embrace art films from France, Germany, Italy, Scandinavia, and Russia in a public event.

The very concept of a film festival has a Western origin, negotiating the interests of film enthusiasts and professionals and nation-states and their industries. Thus Mussolini promoted the first festival amidst a triumphal celebration of national culture in Venice in 1934. Cannes followed in 1939, with copious Hollywood support (although this edition aborted when Hitler invaded Poland). The revived Venice and Cannes, along with neutral Locarno (Switzerland) and Berlin, founded in 1952, became Cold War redoubts in an older division of First World against the Socialist Second World, with its own festivals at Karlovy-Vary (Czechoslovakia) and Moscow.

Such older European festivals continue to dominate the global film festival circuit in prestige, form and circulation (See Wong 2011). The direct inspiration for the HKIFF came from the London Film Festival, which Paul Young, the director of the Hong Kong Urban Council, attended in the mid-1970s. Building on European roots and practices,² the HKIFF, established in 1977, became one of the first and the longest-running international film festivals in Asia.

To this day, the HKIFF, ensconced within the global film festival circuit, follows this evolving Western model. In order to differentiate itself from the rest of the pack, it has created its identity by relations to Hong Kong, Chinese cinema and to a larger extent, Asian Cinema. Nevertheless, the West remains the unacknowledged benchmark of the festival world and the HKIFF.

This subtle unmarked Westernness goes beyond the festival model or selection of films. Half of the films shown in the very first festival were Asian, after all. Nevertheless, even these were subtitled in English. Therefore, like most European films, they could only be appreciated by an English-literate audience. While this did not entail a rigid geographical definition of the West, the selection of global art films and of local audiences proved very much in tune with the art cinema canon established in the West. "Art" films continue to constitute the core of festivals and shape the tastes of a film festival public worldwide. In both new screenings and retrospectives, French, Italian, and Japanese aesthetic films remain the most popular of HKIFF festival films.

The boundaries of the West, in fact, remain fluid. Over the years, the Western canon and its festivals have opened wider – incorporating Spain, Portugal, Greece, Romania, and American independents. Many of the former involve a dialectic of Orientalization and normalization within the West – when Buñuel won the Palme d'Or at Cannes for *Viridiana* (Luis Buñuel, 1961), the film remained banned in the Spain it depicted. Even the filmic definition of European art films shows an interesting albeit incomplete correspondence to the expansion of the EU (although

Scandinavian films have epitomized art since the silent era). Over time, the Hong Kong festival selections echo trends that emerge in other festivals worldwide – showcasing Romanian, Czech, and nascent Polish films in recent editions, for example.

The search for alternatives to Hollywood – via retrospectives on noir or the lionization of independents such as John Cassavetes, Quentin Tarantino, and Michael Moore, underscores further tensions within this filmic mapping of the West. The United States and Hollywood control filmic and other geographies worldwide – but concepts of “art film” have limited the claims of Hollywood in film festivals (however prized its stars and publicity might be). Independents complete “the West” while avoiding the pitfalls of Hollywood domination.

The hegemonic role of the West also shapes the public pedagogy by which the festival situates films and filmmakers and guides its audience into the appreciation of a global, albeit Western-dominated canon. Following Li’s idea of “兼收並蓄” (embracing diversity), the Hong Kong festival has offered retrospectives on myriad film makers, film movements, genres, and film studios since its early days. In 2011, for example, the roster in the HKIFF “In Focus” and “Tribute” sections included Abbas Kiarostami, Shibuya Minoru, Joyce Wieland, Kihachiro Kawamoto, Fortissimo Films, Union Studio, Vietnam cinema, Wai Kar-fai, and Kuei Chih-hung. In 2010, Theo Angelopoulos, Krzysztof Zanussi, Raymond Red (Filipino), and Lung Kong were honored; Tributes showcased Bruce Lee, Yasujiro Shimazu, Guru Dutt (India), and Fei Mu. In 2009, finally, honorees included Film Workshop Productions, Italian Cinema, Finnish Cinema, Jun Ichikawa, Yu Hyun-mok, Michelangelo Antonioni, Ingmar Bergman, Hans Richter, and Evan Yang. All these contemporary rosters show the festivals as defining sites of global cinema. The two sections always include Asian cinema: there have been consistent Japanese offerings and there are always local Hong Kong tributes, now programmed primarily by the Hong Kong Film Archive. Yet, outside of Asia, the dominant figures remain European masters like the recently deceased Antonioni and Bergman in 2009 or emergent Eastern Europeans. European film history also provides the intertext for describing new filmmakers, whatever their origins, who are described as “reminiscent of Fellini, Bergman, etc.”

Meanwhile, Africans and even Americans, both North and South, rarely gain the center stage. This pattern continues in sections on the avant garde and experimental filmmakers, the range of filmmakers aligns closely to the art world and its own Eurocentric logic.

Yet this West / East balance runs deeper. In the 2011 edition, Abbas Kiarostami and Minoru Shibuya, are clearly Asian filmmakers from Iran and Japan. Yet, they are not just any Asian filmmakers, but Asian filmmakers who have gained recognition in the West. Kiarostami has been winning festival prizes in the West since 1989, including a Palme d’Or in 1997. He embodies star-power in the international film festival circuit. Kiarostami’s “Italian” film with Juliet Binoche, *Certified Copies* (2011), screened in 2011 at the HKIFF as well. Iran, meanwhile, although

Orientalized for centuries, also occupies a peculiar geographic space between East Asia and Europe, especially in terms of its demands on the European gaze.

The late Minoru Shibuya of Shochiku Studio is less well-known than Abbas Kiarostami, but “he has done the rounds at Berlin and Cannes.” (*Film in Japan* 2011) His films competed at Cannes in the 1950s. He was rediscovered and promoted through Tokyo Filmex, a festival that triangulates well with both the HKIFF and Berlin. In 2010, this resulted in a retrospective on Shibuya which these two festivals shared.

If we look to the Master Class section of the festival, Eurocentric art is even clearer. Those highlighted include a diverse albeit Eurocentric (and male) pantheon of directors including Wim Wenders and Werner Herzog (German), Béla Tarr (Hungarian), Jan Svankmajer (Czech), Abbas Kiarostami (Iranian), Otar Iosseliani (Georgian), Jerzy Skolimowski (Polish), and Manoel de Oliveira (Portuguese). Four others come from the Americas, including the venerable American independent (a.k.a. non-Hollywood) documentarians, Errol Morris and Frederick Wiseman. Patricio Guzmán (Chilean) rounded out the roster with Raoul Ruiz (Chilean, resident in France from 1973 until his death in 2011). Again, the two non-European, non-North American auteurs have become famous through the global–Western festival world.

In fact, in order for the HKIFF to survive, Li Cheuk-to stresses that it needs to follow international trends and connections:

The festival needs to be aware of the global situation, for example the distribution systems of mainstream and art cinema.... Since these have changed, festivals also have to change. Film festival used to be quite separated from commerce.... But Filmart is very much like the Marché in Cannes. It is very clear that it is a film market, to watch a film there is about buying and selling.³

While the increasing connection of HKIFF and Filmart embodies postcolonial strategies to promote the Hong Kong brand, the reality is that the HKIFF also follows modes set by global festivals. And the global festivals calling the shots remain European. If successful, Hong Kong, can differentiate itself in becoming the agency of such trends and markets in “the East” or “Asia.”

Over its three-decade-plus history, the HKIFF has changed from a totally governmental entity run by the colonial Urban Council to the postcolonial Leisure and Cultural Service Department under the SAR government, to a private non-profit corporation: the Hong Kong International Film Festival Society. In terms of filmic geographies, besides a heavier emphasis on Chinese and to a lesser extent Asian cinema, the programming strategies, in terms of geographic origins, have not changed a great deal. Thus HKIFF demarcates the West not only through its programming of cinema from the West, or even its roots as a Western practice, but through its ability to have connections with film festivals and more recently film producers, investors, and distributors from the West.

These continue to layer contrary meanings into spectatorship itself. Many in local audiences, over the years, look forward to seeing works from abroad. Yet for out-of-Hong Kong visitors, the HKIFF is known for its Asian offerings. Another “Westernness” of the festival thus lies in its ability to draw audience from the West. That is, the ability of the HKIFF to bring Asian cinema, more specifically Chinese cinema and Hong Kong cinema, to the West defines its unique cinematic geography, not unlike the city’s traditional role of an entrepôt, or a door to the East.

A Swinging Gate to the East

The HKIFF, of course, cannot escape the East – because it takes place “in the East.” Nonetheless, the complex question that remains is what processes within the festival have projected or obscured the East, how the East has been constructed. In the most fundamental level, the East of the HKIFF encompasses the local (Hong Kong), the national (China), the cultural (greater China), and a wider political economic sense of Asia: the last a construct too big and too contradictory to become a single coherent entity or program.

As mentioned in the previous section, when the festival first started in the late 1970s it offered a diverse lineup, even though cinema from the West dominated audience attention. Except for its promotion of local Hong Kong cinema, selections reflected Western dominance in the global art cinema world, rather than a specific HKIFF viewpoint. In this global network, Asian cinema, except for limited Japanese and Indian cinema, did not ascend to the Western-defined hierarchy of world cinema until the 1980s. It finally became a recognized part of world cinema around the 1990s, partly though the efforts of the HKIFF in collaborations with other festivals within and outside Asia. Since then, major European and American festivals have always programmed some Asian cinema in their competitive lineups, although the boundaries between Wong Kar-wai and Stephen Chow affirm a hegemonic gaze: Hong Kong films for festivals should be popular in Europe, but not always the most popular films at home.

By contrast, the first Hong Kong festival lacked Chinese films, except for King Hu’s *A Touch of Zen* (1971) as the closing film. By the time of the organization of the second festival in 1978, however, those in charge saw the need / possibility to use the festival to learn more about and thus promote Hong Kong cinema. At the time, this thriving industry had limited artistic stature in colonial society. Local Hong Kong cinema was well attended, but enjoyed little cultural esteem. Since then, the festival has curated, archived, and published scores of programs, films, and books on different aspects of Hong Kong cinema – the very foundation needed for serious research for both film programming and publications. This continued, concerted effort has made Hong Kong cinema a respectable scholarly pursuit. It

means that scholars and film programmers must come to Hong Kong (and HKIFF) to learn about its cinema and to assess its resources.

In the twenty-first century, the festival continues to promote Hong Kong cinema. In 2011, it paid tribute to the Union Production Company in Hong Kong (1952–1964), while Wai Ka-fai, who has worked closely with Johnnie To, became the focus director alongside Kuei Chih-hung, a Shaw Brothers studio director of the 1970s. In 2010, the festival paid tribute to Hong Kong auteur Lung Kong, one of the directors whom the 1970s festival had celebrated, and Fei Mu (1906–1951), a Chinese filmmaker for whom the archive is restoring many films. With a nod to transnational connections and variety (and perhaps foreign images of Hong Kong filmmaking), the festival also celebrated the 70th birthday of Bruce Lee. Since Hong Kong has always been a relatively small film producer, some of the programs, like those for Lung Kong and Bruce Lee, were somewhat repeated retrospectives.

The role of the festival in preservation and interpretation of Hong Kong film as art to the West was emphasized in a 1984 issue of the French journal *Cahiers du Cinéma* devoted to Hong Kong film. Filmmakers and critics Olivier Assayas and Serge Daney had established connections through international festival programmers such as Tony Rayns and Marco Müller. As Assayas (who later married Hong Kong star Maggie Cheung) wrote “it was like discovering a new continent. We had no idea who were the directors, what were the films, what were the classics.... it was like discovering something completely new.” While this remains a Western vision of “the East,” it located the HKIFF as a gateway in Western consciousness.

While the HKIFF has not only discovered but also preserved, studied, and fostered a metropolitan “East” through its promotion of Hong Kong films, the establishment of Hong Kong’s place within Greater China has proved slower and more difficult. Here, colonial relations with the mainland and Taiwan as well as the evolution of Hong Kong film production have all played their parts.

Initially, the British colonial mentality dictated that a cultural event like the HKIFF should not invite any politically sensitive scrutiny of any kind. Therefore, in its first four years of existence, from 1977 to 1980, no film from *either* the People’s Republic of China or Taiwan screened at the festival.⁴ As the festival continued to promote Hong Kong cinema, however, it inevitably involved films made by mobile and migrant Chinese filmmakers, like Zhu Shilin or King Hu, who had come to Hong Kong from the mainland as a teenager in 1949 and moved to Taiwan for the bulk of his career after 1966. Like Hong Kong itself, Hu could not be labeled by his varied relations to China even as he created powerful filmic myths for all Chinas.

Hong Kong was not alone in this. When the Cannes film festivals screened three Li Han-hsiang films from Hong Kong Shaw Brothers Studio in the 1960s, the films received the generic label “Chine,” hardly identifying Hong Kong, the PRC, or Taiwan. Still, while Chinese films were relatively negligible at the A festivals before

the 1980s, Hong Kong did send King Hu's 1971 film *A Touch of Zen* to Cannes to compete in 1975. The HKIFF recognized the importance of its homage to Hu, in turn, partly because of his success in the West. Various Hong Kong agencies, with the resources offered by the HKIFF, pioneered regular screenings of films from Hong Kong and China at Western festivals only after 1980s (Wong 2006).

Back home in Hong Kong, Taiwan films did not appear until 1987, when the colonial government no longer paid too much attention to this issue. The Joint Declaration that Hong Kong rule would revert to China had been signed in 1984 and British colonial politicians permitted many such issues after they had passed on responsibilities. Nonetheless, as in the case of Cannes, identifying Chinas remained an issue. Faced with difficult negotiations stemming from censorship from the PRC (Wong 2011: 210–216), the HKIFF approach became differentiation by Chinese “language”: films made in Taiwan are labeled “Mandarin,” while those from the mainland are listed as being in “Putonghua.”

As many have argued, relations with China became even more important in this decade as the birth of Chinese Fifth Generation Cinema took place in Hong Kong Film Festival in 1985 (Berry 2002; Wong 2011). This screening of *Yellow Earth* (Chen Kaige, 1984) brought both Chen Kaige and Zhang Yimou to international attention. Film programmers and critics there to watch the film became excited about this new Chinese cinema that many had never seen. This eventually led to multiple recognitions for Zhang's film *Red Sorghum* (1987), including Berlin's Golden Bear in 1988 and Chen's *Farewell my Concubine* (1993) winning Canne's Palme d'Or in 1993. Ironically, that trajectory meant that these films would not premiere in the HKIFF.

Nonetheless, HKIFF has continued to support mainland Chinese filmmakers. With the Sixth Generation, or Urban Generation, the HKIFF was one of the earliest festivals to promote one of this generation's stars – Jia Zhangke (Li, Wong and Wong 2010). *Platform* (2000) was screened in the festival's “The Age of Independents: New Asian Film and Video.” Jia and HKIFF have continued their collaborations, not only in programming of Jia's films, but also by hosting parties and having him run seminars and master classes. As Jia moved from being an underground filmmaker to an above-ground one, he continues to work with the HKIFF, including his participation with the HAF.⁵ However, it is now very hard to obtain a premiere from Jai, since the A festivals always try to snare his films, as they did with *Still Lives* (2006), which won the Golden Lion at Venice. Jia nonetheless received the best director award for *Still Lives* at the first Asian Film Award in 2007. Yet, once again, Europe has more global power, especially in endowing international prestige to Chinese cinema.

Besides high-profile successes like Zhang and Jia, HKIFF has actively cultivated Chinese independent cinema and serves as a showcase for these films and a conduit for them to reach the West. In 1999, the festival established Age of Independents (AOI) series of new Asian Film and Video which started to attract independent filmmakers from mainland China. Li Duoyu stresses that

not only did the festival invited independent filmmakers to Hong Kong, it organized seminars and parties, allowing the filmmakers to make connections and even teach them to find international financing. AOI has become the important annual meeting place between independent producers and cinematic guests. New directors from the mainland, like Jia Zhangke and Lou Ye have been heavily promoted via this event (Li 2002).

Over the years, programmers and film critics from Europe, from *Cahiers du Cinéma* to Ulrich Gregor of Berlin Forum, United States film scholar David Bordwell and Marco Müller, past director of Locarno and present director of Venice, have to come to Hong Kong to seek exciting works that they could not find in Berlin, Paris, London, or Toronto. Only with the establishment of then Pusan (now Busan) International Film Festival in the 1990s, could film professionals from the West find another similar Asian venue for Asian cinema. The East remains the product that the HKIFF uses to attract the West.

Scholars agree that a global film festival network builds knowledge on human relationships attached to changing structures (De Valck 2007; Wong 2011). Programmers know and depend on each other to find the next hot films. So do producers. In the recent era of festival sponsored co-production, HKIFF programmers have become key liaisons between some of the European festivals and mainland Chinese independent filmmakers. With the increased importance of co-production fora, in the last ten to fifteen years, Chinese filmmakers have used connections through HKIFF to make contact with European financial backers and investors. These relationships, embedded in Hong Kong and the HKIFF as a global center for China become multilayered and complex. In 2009, for example, Locarno's Open Doors project was only opened to filmmakers from Greater China. Ten projects from China and two from Hong Kong were selected; no project from Taiwan was included. While this might reflect the quality of the projects submitted, in general, Li Cheuk-to agreed that with the rise of the PRC and the interested generated, it is much harder for a Taiwan filmmaker to break into the international film festival circuit than ones from mainland China.⁶

Journalist Li Hongyu visited the Locarno Film Festival with twelve directors from mainland China and Hong Kong attending the Open Doors Factory Project. Li's headline described "Chinese Filmmakers *being trained* at Locarno" (emphasis added), conveying a clear idea of mentor and student. Jacob Wong from HKIFF and Vincenzo Bungo of Open Doors chose the twelve projects; the HKIFF then becomes an important link between these Chinese filmmakers and their primary sources of investments. Yet, what the filmmakers were learning is "sales" (推銷). Li also stresses that, unlike state sanctioned commercial movies, Chinese independent cinema relies heavily on Western film festivals for production and exhibition. He is also very clear that few of these projects have received or will receive funding from Europe and greater challenges lie ahead. Li also quotes Wong, who notes that while a film like *Courthouse on Horseback* (Liu Jie 2006) won the Horizons Award at Venice,

it made only four hundred Euros in its Chinese box office. In many ways, even while the HKIFF has made a concerted effort to promote Chinese independent cinema, it continues to be an uphill battle to really make meaningful impacts on either the international film festival circuit or on conservative debates at home.

Nevertheless, the changing roles of China in the twenty-first century continue to remap relationships. Joe Morgenstern, writing for the *Wall Street Journal* in 2011 about the 35th festival, identified China as the “800 pound dragon” in the room, adding

Everyone at the festival, filmmakers and producers alike, seemed to be talking about it. Hong Kong directors and world-class stars such as Jackie Chan, Jet Li, Andy Lau, and Chow Yun-fat have been moving to the mainland, where the action is. Chinese competition for audience share has compounded Hong Kong’s already acute problem of competing with Hollywood. Beijing’s tight import controls – currently twenty foreign films a year, though that may loosen in the near future – are forcing more producers from Hong Kong and elsewhere into co-productions – deals with Chinese partners that circumvent the quota but come under the censors’ gaze. And Chinese tastes have shifted. The most telling emblem of that shift is Gong Li, the peerlessly beautiful star of such classics as *Raise the Red Lantern* and *Farewell My Concubine*. Her latest film is a mainland remake of the Mel Gibson–Helen Hunt romantic comedy *What Women Want* (Morgenstern 2011).

A final index of the HKIFF’s construction of the East is its opening and gala films, which definitely draw more attention than other films in the festival. In the last few editions, all opening films have been from Hong Kong. As Li Cheuk-to explains, quality is the prime determining factor, and the festival gives priority to Hong Kong-produced films, then Chinese-language films and then Asian cinema (Zheng 2010). This, of course, differs from the initial festival more than 30 years ago under a different organization and political structure, where delayed European art films dominated the opening gala, from Roberto Rossellini’s *Italy Year One* (1974; screened 1977) to Carlos Saura’s *Raise Ravens* (1976 / 1978).

Hong Kong provided the 2011 festival’s two opening films: *Don’t Go Breaking My Heart* (2011), a premiering romantic drama by Hong Kong action auteur Johnnie To, and an anthology film, *Quattro Hong Kong 2*, combining Thai and Filipino auteurs / Cannes-winners Apichatpong Weerasethakul and Brillante Mendoza with the up and coming Malaysian Chinese director Yuhang Ho (prizes at Nantes and Rotterdam), and the venerable Hong Kong director Stanley Kwan. *Don’t Go Breaking My Heart* represented the crowd-pleasing, commercial side of the festival: the film would open about two weeks later in Hong Kong and China. Yet, Johnnie To gives the films cultural sheen through his growing global cult / auteur status. The other omnibus film resembled the art films shown since the very beginning of the festival and celebratory anthologies characteristic of festivals like Cannes, but with a product “Made in Asia.” Other gala events of 2011 included an older Hong Kong Yonfan film, a few other Hong Kong and Chinese products, a Japanese–Canadian film, and both Japanese and French animated films. These creative credentials embed

the HKIFF as a Chinese / Asian showcase in a wider global circuit. Moreover, Hong Kong acts as a gateway from a constructed East to an imagined “West,” presumably including “5,000 business executives who attend Hong Kong Film and Television Market (FILMART), a concurrent event of the HKIFF.”

The establishment of the Asian Film Award (AFA) in 2007 further attempted to establish Hong Kong as a regional power. While different in orientation from the festival, it promotes a larger array of Asian Cinema, both art and mainstream. Its Lifetime Achievement Award has honored film workers primarily in mainstream cinema, including Josephine Siao, Yoji Yamada, Tsui Hark, Amitabh Bachchan, Raymond Chow, and Ann Hui. With corporatization and the need to attract private funding, the AFA offers the side attractions to the festival: red carpet, press, and stars that make sponsors as well as audiences happy. At the same time, the AFA delineates the cinematic East, where it has given the best film and director awards to Chinese, Korean, Japanese, and Thai cinema and auteurs.⁷ The jury members of the award also draw primarily from film workers in Asia, with one or two jury members from the United States or European A festivals, such as Marco Müller (Venice), Christian Jeune (Cannes), and Christoph Terhechte (Berlin). The AFA defines the East, with added legitimation from the West. The AFA is now jointly run by the Hong Kong, Busan, and Tokyo Film Festivals and has moved to Macau since 2014.

At the same time, through the AFA, HAF and its programming, the HKIFF has negotiated changing relations with other Asian states and filmmaking cultures, including the Philippines, Korea, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, and India. These recast the East in terms of power relations of North and South, to which I now turn. Through examples from each, we can understand a mapping of Asia divided by power, tensions, and competition from other festivals. The claims that Hong Kong has made in both production support and the Asian Film Awards provide metrics for dynamic cinematic mapping.

Yet, this mapping of Asia for the HKIFF demands consideration of two final but complicated relationships, that between the festival and Japanese and South Korean cinemas. Japanese cinema was one of the first non-European cinemas that broke the Eurocentric barrier at European film festivals and in art canons. Hong Kong cinephiles of the 1960s and 1970s knew the works of Akira Kurosawa and Yasujiro Ozu. In today’s Hong Kong, Japanese popular as well as elite culture continues to resonate across the varied tastes of different segments of the Hong Kong population. Japanese cinema found its way into the HKIFF program effortlessly ever since its inception, and it has remained at the heart of the festival to this day. The festival also has showcased works from Kiyoshi Kurosawa, Naomi Kawase, Shunji Iwai, and many other contemporary filmmakers.

As the HKIFF seeks to expand its audience base and attract younger viewers, in fact, it strives to include popular Japanese cinema in the youth-oriented “I See It My Way” section. In 2010, four out of the six films selected were Japanese. The 2011 programs included *Milocrorze – A Love Story* (Yoshimasa Ishibashi, 2011) from Japan. The festival thus channels flows of popular culture models that have been

equally present in music, fashion, and soap operas, especially with the incorporation of Taiwan, alongside a long-standing Western gaze on Japan as art.

With the success of Korean popular culture in the East Asian region, Korean films, both “art” and “popular” have gained similar traction at the HKIFF. Most Korean films that have gained wider A-festival recognition arrive at the HKIFF: works by Lee Chang-dong, Park Chan-wook, and Kim Ki-duk have been audience favorites. *The Host* (Bong Joon-ho, 2006) received the first Best Picture award from the AFA in 2007 where Rain, the megastar and main actor of Park’s *I’m a Cyborg, but That’s Okay* (Park Chan-wook, 2007) (which was also in competition) was the undisputed heart-throb of the ceremony. The HAF also has promoted Korean projects into global rosters. For example, *The Yellow Sea* (Na Hong-jin, 2009), a HAF 2009 project, screened at Cannes *Un Certain Regard* and Park’s 2009 Cannes’ Jury Prize-winner *Thirst* was a 2008 HAF project.

The HKIFF has an interesting competitive relationship with Korean cinema. Busan and HKIFF are major competitors in East Asia for films and filmmakers. Nevertheless, filmmakers, programmers, and other film workers constantly engage co-production and collaboration that signify a regional strategy that most festivals adopt in order to compete in a global cinema and film festival network. The definition of Asia around China, Confucianism and success is one we must return to as we explore the final power relations mapped by Hong Kong.

North and South

As noted at the beginning, any familiar, albeit constructed, dichotomy of East and West is complicated by another division commonly used in film worlds, that between North and South. As this construct emerged to describe political relations between richer nations in relationship to poorer nations – replacing other Cold War politicized terms like “Third World” or “non-aligned” – geographies refer less to cultural or political traditions than to economic power. The power to finance, produce, and distribute “quality products” that has set apart major film traditions from emergent cinemas of Africa, Latin America, and some parts of Asia. Australia, for example, is clearly North while Caribbean islands are not. Again, there are borders to cross – the nations of Eastern Europe and others of the Mediterranean (Turkey, Israel) have made ambivalent claims, both political and aesthetic, on Northern status.

These distinctions become important to the Hong Kong International Film Festival in its general participation in an imagined world of film festivals that includes southern festivals like Havana (Cuba), Mar del Plata (Argentina), Jakarta (Indonesia), Cape Town (South Africa), and Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso). These festivals are not places of deep global festival connection or even textual reference in the same way that programmers attend and use materials from Cannes, Berlin, Locarno, Toronto, or Tokyo Filmex. Latin American filmmakers have forged

paths, first in Havana, then into the cinematic North. They often find recognition there in a “special circuit” through San Sebastian (an A-level festival in Spain that relies on strategic linguistic and neocolonial connections), the Festival de Trois Continents in Nantes and other European venues. The situation of African films is even more striking. Even FESPACO in Burkina Faso and Cape Town showcase only limited production, often dependent on European funding. Meanwhile, popular genres and industries like Nollywood (Nigerian films) or its avatars in Ghana or Liberia remain beyond the pale of global art and festivals. And Arab cinema – with money-rich festivals in Dubai in a production-poor zone – raises further questions about global and local stages. The isolation of these festival networks, the construction of special festivals for these cinemas, and their categorization within other festivals betray differences in canonical evaluation and popularity among imagined Western spectators.

Moreover, in many cases, lack of resources means that these nations have limited facilities to train filmmakers or to polish products. Indeed, one often hears North used in film circles in terms of collaborations that support less well established directors, even at the cost of cultural integrity. Beyond European festivals from Rotterdam, Udine, and Nantes to Fribourg dedicated to cinema of the South, many co-production fora, like Rotterdam’s Hubert Bals, Berlin’s Co-Production Market, and Locarno’s Open Door, channel European funds into film productions in the South. And screen the products in return.

Amid these perspectives, Hong Kong appears to be neither simply North nor South. In the pantheon of film festivals, Hong Kong is not an A festival, even though it channels Chinese-language and other Asian films into these festivals. In terms of local cinema, few Hong Kong films achieve distribution in the West and many are derided for speed and budget. Yet, because of its auteurs and middling commercial success in the late 80s and early 90s, Hong Kong cinema has a global profile and strong local facilities as well as a vibrant community of teachers, critics, and emergent filmmakers. Despite a recent period of decline, old and new few auteurs (Wong Kar-wai, Tsui Hark, Johnnie To) and a few actors (Jackie Chan, Maggie Cheung, Jet Li) resonate outside the region. Even if Hong Kong cinema of late has gained limited recognition, commercially or artistically, in the West, it has done well over decades in screens in the South, as Brian Larkin shows in the case of Nigeria (2008).

At the same time, Hong Kong frequently acts like a Northern filmmaker, “loaning” out established production, finance, and connections. Hong Kong long has shared films with *nanyang* audiences; for decades, firms such as Shaw Brothers and Cathay studio maintained pan-Asian connections. Power relations today are channeled through and reaffirm the prestige of the HKIFF. In so doing, the HKIFF has defined a relatively limited South, primarily Asian but selective even within that realm; the Non-Asian South, as noted, scarcely appears in the festival calendar, much less other arenas. Yet, the development of Chinese filmmakers in Malaysia, Mongolian auteurs, or Indonesian documentaries – and the views of producers in

these areas – reveals sliding, sometimes contradictory geographies of film that contribute to the vitality of HKIFF and Hong Kong film itself.

We begin with programming, noting varied HKIFF readings of close and distant neighbors as well as power over them. Since its very beginning, the HKIFF has focused attention on Southeast Asian cinema from the Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, and Vietnam. Lino Brocka's *Human Imperfections* (1974) from the Philippines screened in the first festival. Kidlat Tahimik, who became a recognized auteur of the global festival scene in the 1970s, was also an early guest of the festival. More recently, HAF supported Brillante Mandoza's project, *Kinatay* (2009), which won him the best director award at Cannes. Less showy products like *Autohystorio* (2007) by Raya Martin are also shown despite very limited attendance. These places and producers are geographically close and programmers from Hong Kong are very familiar with the Cinemanila Film festival. When Cinemanila ran their first co-production seminar in 1999, many HKIFF-related personnel were there, including Li Cheuk-to, Jacob Wong, Wouter Barendrecht, and Chris Doyle (ClickTheCity 2005). At the same time, despite the palace Imelda Marcos built for the Manila Film Festival, Filipino events have never challenged the global position of the HKIFF itself.

Thai cinema has also come to be recognized by European A festivals in the twenty-first century. Again, Hong Kong cinema has long maintained close relations with Thailand. Thailand provided settings for films like *The Big Boss* (Lo Wei, 1971) and *Duel of Fists* (Chang Cheh, 1971). Wong Kar-wai shot part of *In the Mood for Love* (2000) in Thailand and also did post-production there. Christopher Doyle is the cinematographer of Pen-Ek Ratanaruang's *Last Life in the Universe* (2003), while director Peter Ho-sun Chan, honored in the 2012 HKIFF, originally comes from Thailand. On a more human level, the late Wouter Barendrecht of Filmart as well as Fortissimo had very close relationship with filmmakers in Thailand, and Fortissimo Films then had close relations with Thailand as well as the HKIFF. These relations evoke connections to Asia through Chinese intermediaries that go beyond the scope of this paper.

The HKIFF became a forerunner of recognition for Thai cinema when Pen-Ek Ratanaruang's *6sixin9* (1999) won the FIPRESCI prize in the 2000 HKIFF; its prizes at Berlin and Rotterdam reinforced the interconnectedness of the festival network. Both Ratanaruang and Apichatpong Weerasethakul also have participated in funding competitions through the HAF. Ratanaruang's *Invisible Waves* was made and competed in Berlin in 2006; Weerasethakul's project, *Utopia*, participated at Cannes's L'Atelier in 2006. One cannot say that the HKIFF is responsible for the global success of Thai films, but Thailand constitutes part of a regional network that the HKIFF constantly cultivates, sponsors, and renews.

HKIFF films from Malaysia include works by James Lee, Ho Yuhang, Yasmin Ahmad, and many others. Many of these are extremely low budget and shot in DV; the HKIFF has organized a DV film competition since 2004. Many of these films face difficulty in getting shown in Malaysia because of censorship, especially

when they broach the subject of a complicated multi-cultural Malay society where ethnic Chinese have faced discrimination as well as achieving successes. Beyond these emergent industries, the HKIFF did a retrospective of Vietnamese Cinema in 2011 where it showed hard-to-find North Vietnamese cinema from 1962 to 1989. This was made possible because the programmer went to Vietnam to scout and curate Vietnamese films. At the same time, the HAF also supports new Vietnamese projects.

Yet there are limits to the Asian South, defined by Indian cinema. This is partly due to the popularity of Bollywood and its dominance in the Indian and global markets. Film festivals have not proven very friendly to mainstream cinema; I have argued that there are specific film festival tastes which have not been receptive to comedy and musicals (Wong 2011). Auteurs like Satyajit Ray and Guru Dutt have been treated like other Western-recognized auteurs, with screenings and retrospectives. In 1998, a special section devoted to the Song and Dance in Indian Cinema included films from the 1930s, therefore paying respect to Indian cinema's historical depth as well as maintaining the serious artistic and scholarly aspect of the HKIFF. But the HKIFF showed only one Indian film in 2004 and none in 2011. The "greater festival" has other venues to honor Bollywood: Amitabh Bachchan (Godfather of Bollywood) received the Lifetime Achievement award at the AFA in 2010 and the festival programmed Bollywood during its more "popular" summer Pops event. In order to include Indian Cinema, then, the festival has mapped the subcontinent differently and divided it to accommodate its so-called art and commercial cinema differently, maintaining cultural hierarchy, while fulfilling the HKIFF mission to be truly diverse.

Looking at the relationships the HKIFF has created with other Asian cinemas, however, it is clear many rely on personal relationships through the festival's network, filmmakers as well as audience. While there have been festivals in Bangkok (in many manifestations), Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, and Manila, none has challenged the regional primacy of Hong Kong as a gateway. If not the North, it is the doorway to the North.

Moreover, except in the cases of India, Japan, and South Korea, the HKIFF has assumed the role of the North in development and aid when it comes to co-production and marketing across Asia. Co-production markets worldwide raise the profile and influence of festivals worldwide and incidentally assure the future flow of new auteurs and exciting products. Thus, while the AFA awards take on some trappings of an Asian North, one of the most important innovations of the HKIFF has been HAF – the Hong Kong Asian Film Financing Forum, which began in 2000. HAF is a film co-production market modeled after Rotterdam's CineMart.⁸ Its unique importance is its regional focus. Even though it does not restrict territorial participations, except for one entry from Iceland, every single entry chosen in its ten year history has come from Asia (including Australia). As the late founder of HAF, Wouter Barendrecht says, "For buyers, it is important to meet in an Asian context because that's how Asians do business" (Kan 2002).

Nonetheless, when HAF was first founded in 2000, before becoming Hong Kong-Asia Screenings (HAS) in 2002, it was not part of HKIFF (joining in 2007). In those years, it funded projects including Tsai Ming-Liang's *The Wayward Cloud* (2005), Shunji Iwai's *Azumi* (2003),⁹ Ann Hui's *Night and Fog* (2009), Ning Hao's *Crazy Racer* (2009), and Pen-ek Ratanaruang's *Invisible Waves* and Apichatpong Weerasethakul's *Utopia*. This list attests to HAF's role in the global festival co-production networks. This very complicated network also helps bring about different forms of association and cooperation. HAF, for example, was an associated partner of Cannes Producers Network. Chinlin Hsieh, one of HAF's international advisors, represented HAF at Cannes and HAF filmmakers, including Apichatpong Weerasethakul also participated in the Cannes Producers Network. In turn, having Hsieh as one of its international advisors helped cement HAF's relationship with Rotterdam where she is a programmer.

Within Asia, HAF now competes with similar programs in Busan, Shanghai, and Taipei. The HAF also competes with new production funds like Ties That Bind, co-organized by Udine and Pusan to encourage European and Asian co-production. At the same time, the HKIFF and HAF have also added new layers to their strategies of global cultural capital with the 2007 creation the Asian Film Awards, with nominees drawn from across Asia. HAF also partners internationally with CineMart, Paris Project Award of Paris Cinéma International Film Festival and regionally with the Busan Asian Project Market (formerly Pusan Production Project PPP) and the Network of Asian Fantastic Films Award of Puchon International Fantastic Film Festival.

The North flows across multiple connections as well. For example, Dang Di Phan's project *Big Father, Small Father and Other Stories* is a Vietnamese film that was selected by HAF in 2011. It won the Paris project award which funded the filmmaker to attend workshops to meet more investors in Paris. *Big Father* first participated at HBF 2011, and then the Ties That Bind project. Thereafter, the film attended both the Asian Film Project in Busan 2011 and the Udine Far East Film Festival 2011. It is not unusual for Asian films to circulate through different co-production projects to pool funding for low-budget, independent productions. Again, the late Walter Barendrecht united these threads: originally from Rotterdam, he then ran Fortissimo Films as both distributors and producers, which was based in Hong Kong, and developed the HAF as he helped cement the relationship between HKIFF and Rotterdam's Hubert Bals Funds and CineMart.

The HAF and AFA continue to create a powerful Asian orientation for HKIFF, oftentimes channeling funds to filmmakers from countries with fewer resources. At the same time, with the growth of China, the HAF has been able to negotiate more cash prizes solely for Chinese language cinema. In 2011, the HAF added a cash prize of HK\$100,000 for the best Chinese-language script (the Script Development Fund). In 2012, it added the FOX Chinese language (HK\$100,000). In its latest edition, HAF started accepting documentary projects, expanding the number of projects to 32. These projects come from Iceland, Australia, and all over "Asia," including Lebanon, Israel, Armenia, India, Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, Japan, and South

Korea. Thirteen projects from China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan still dominate the lineup, with China having six projects, the most from any country.

Hence, the HAF continues to carve its own global niche, bring money from all over the world to invest in Asian cinema. Even though Chinese-language cinema occupies a dominant position, HAF continues to encourage projects from all over Asia. Nonetheless, the South and even the East remain contested fields. Within Asia, competing with Busan, Tokyo, and even Shanghai, the HKIFF has sought to assume some kind of leadership in supporting Asian cinema. Being the longest-running Asian festival, the HKIFF has used its screening and network dominance to further cultivate this leadership role within Asia. Moreover, its organizers have recognized that the HKIFF forms part of the regional and global film festival networks and that festivals can no longer thrive by only showing the best, hottest films: they have to facilitate the making and distribution of these films. The HAF fulfils this role for the HKIFF, demanding a respectable place in the production of Chinese-language as well as Asian Cinema, positioning the festival squarely in the East as well as the North.

Conclusions

In 2010, newly appointed HKIFF director Roger Garcia averred,

We need to re-think our map of the world in terms of cinema; because audiences are emerging from unexpected places – in South America, other parts of Asia, e.g., Vietnam. I think Hong Kong, being the ultimate entrepôt and traders' paradise, is a territory that is well-placed to seize on those moments when markets emerged, in terms of cinema, and to try and bring people together to take advantage of those opportunities.

The cliché of Hong Kong being the meeting place of East and West is now more than a century old, nuanced and deconstructed by growth, criticism, and change. Yet just like the division mapped out here for North and South, the cinematic geographies of the HKIFF remain a world of dynamic interconnected domains. Personal connections, global networks, politics and economics, and constant explorations have made the HKIFF a unique node of the local and global. By reading its mappings, in turn, we rediscover perspectives on the history, business, audiences, and future of Hong Kong cinema itself. The HKIFF, through its varied histories, working under different administrations, embedded within an ever-changing film festival world, has continued to find its voice which seems to be solidly grounded in the "East." Yet it remains an "East" that is heavily entangled with the world, defining and being defined as producer, audience, middleman, and object of a European gaze. Just like Hong Kong itself, the complexities of the HKIFF mark it as a laboratory of globalization, embodiment, and forerunner of even wider changes worldwide.

Notes

- 1 See Bo Ming (2003): “香港國際電影節一向都以這份兼收並蓄 (*jian shou bing xu*) 的多元性自豪, 多年前我曾經寫過, 『民主多元, 打破壟斷』, 是電影節的存在理由, 因為它是每年一度密集放映平日被商業發行制度排斥的各國電影, 從而打破一切 (因商業或政治導致的) 主流電影意識形態壟斷和宰制的盛會”.
- 2 Film Festivals in the US belong to a very different category because of their proximity to Hollywood. See Wong 2011.
- 3 See Zhang (2009): “其實很多時候我們也不一定要做大, 做成什麼樣的規模, 說實在的, 很多時候反而是都是『因應時勢』而改變。所謂的『時勢』, 就是看外面其他的電影節, 外面國際上整個的趨勢, 譬如主流電影、藝術電影各方面的發行形勢, 現在和以前就有很大的改變, 所以電影節在裡面扮演的角色也有所改變, 其實也不是扮演角色, 而是保持距離的比例會隨之改變, 譬如以前比較單純, 電影節就是一個文化交流活動, 跟生意、市場離得比較遠、比較開。像『香港國際影視展』, 一如戛納市場展, 開宗明義就是電影市場, 去那裡看片, 就是為了買賣影片、談交易的, 買家、賣家在裡頭”.
- 4 *A Touch of Zen* is an exception, considering King Hu's role as working closely between Hong Kong and Taiwan.
- 5 Jia Zhengke, *Shuang Xiong Hui*, 2007, HAF selected project, still in production at the time of writing.
- 6 Interview with Li Cheuk-to, June 2007.
- 7 The best directors and best films in the last five editions of the AFA are: 2007: Jia Zhangke; *The Host*; 2008: Lee Chang-dong; *Secret Sunshine*; 2009: Hirokazu Koreeda; *Tokyo Sonata*; 2010: Lu Chuan; *Mother*; 2011: Lee Chang-dong; *Uncle Boonmee Who can Recall His Past Lives*.
- 8 There was no HAF in 2001, 2002, and 2004.
- 9 Shunji Iwai was supposed to direct *Azumi*; in the end it was directed by Ryuhei Kitamura.

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Postmodernity, Han Normativity, and Hong Kong Cinema

Evans Chan

In 2012, a Hong Kong film, directed by Pang Ho-cheung, one of the leading commercial filmmakers in the former British colony's decimated and struggling post-1997 film industry, and forthrightly titling itself *Vulgaria*, became one of the few local hits of the year. The blood of a culture/political war, though, can be smelled behind this comedy about a down-on-his-luck Hong Kong producer (Chapman To), who debases himself morally and sexually in order to get a *nouveau riche* PRC gangster to back the making of a porn flick. But the Hong Kong audiences' laughter soon turned into angry howls when Jasmine Jia, an aspiring young woman critic, penned an award-winning essay condemning the film as a piece of crowd-pleasing "cultural trash," whose "waywardness" has encouraged Hong Kongers' "anti-intellectualism" and "acceptance of and even taking pride in vulgarity."¹ She blames the film's "low taste" on the Hong Kongers' inability to adjust themselves to their reversed role vis-à-vis the mainland. As the former wealthy cousins now becoming poor relations to the PRC, Hong Kongers, she asserted, could only channel their angst and sense of impotence through "demonizing the mainland Chinese." In conclusion, she emphasized that Hong Kong films should provide a "healthy way to appreciate beauty and reflect reality with humane concerns." What seems notable is the fact that almost as an aside, she avowed in a sweeping statement: "Hong Kong doesn't have much to offer culturally." Immediately, Jia's views were challenged because of her background – she is from Beijing and works for the pro-PRC local daily *Wen Wei Pao*.

Amusing as this controversy might be – there has never been a lack of self-styled "highbrow" scolds of popular culture – those Hong Kongers who were

furious at Jia's self-important didacticism may not have enough cultural memory to assess the debate. In truth, *Vulgaria's* presentation of Hong Kong–PRC relations and the censuring of Hong Kong film and culture by a Northerner is, with the onset of China's (post)modernity, just the latest in a long history of skirmishes between the Sinitic North and South. The conflict might have intensified with Hong Kong's reabsorption, under the "one country, two systems" formula, into China in 1997, an occasion that prompted Rey Chow to contend that "the actual social antagonisms separating China and Hong Kong... are often overwritten with the myth of consanguinity." (Chow 1993: 24) But this myth is not exactly *empty*, as she claimed. Chinese consanguinity has been naturalized into an imaginary ethnicity known as Han, which consolidated itself during the last years of China's imperial past, i.e., the Manchu-ruled Qing dynasty. This took place at a time when China was confronted by the pressures, imperialistic or simply competitive, emanating from the international system of nation-states, as well as the Darwinist threat, be it paranoid or not, of *racial* extinction.² Precipitated by virulent anti-Manchu sentiments, this Han imaginary was mobilized to construct a strong China through racial / ethno empowerment as propelled by a racial / ethno hatred toward its minority, Manchu rulers. This racial / ethno will to "rejuvenate the Chinese [i.e., Han] nation" led to the anti-Manchu Republican (*Xinhai*) Revolution of 1911.

One could say that the advent of a Han (spectatorial) subject coincided with the indigenous development of Chinese cinema. In that plane known as nationalism, where the warfare of interpellation is subtly fought, the bludgeon that the successive Chinese governments have wielded since the 1911 Revolution – which ushered in China's modern nation- and state-hood – over this heterogeneous ancient civilization emerging as a modern nation is what I call *Han normativity*. As the Han morphed into China's "default" ethnic group, constituting more than 90 percent of the PRC population, and has since disguised itself as a broader sounding the Chinese race (*Zhonghua minxu* 中華民族), a Han-centric vision rose to demarcate the field of the invisible (Han) Self and the visible ethnic Other, the co-ordinates of the center and the periphery, the separation of the authentic from the inauthentic (Chinese-ness), and the differentiation of high and low culture.

Benedict Anderson has used a striking metaphor – "stretching the short, tight skin of the nation over the enormous fat body of the empire" (Anderson 1991: 86) – to describe nationalism's project to reconcile the diverse racial / ethnic body of the nation with its territorial reach. But China's Han "skin" has difficulties covering, not only the gargantuan body of major ethnic groups such as the Tibetan, Mongol, and Uyghur, but also other Sinitic peoples who are often considered "Han" – e.g., the Southerners and citizens of Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan, who have been shaped by historical as well as sociopolitical experiences that are different from the Northern-based Han-hood historically sold by the Northern government. For example, during the Mongol Yuan

dynasty (1271–1368), society was divided into four classes in order of privilege: the Mongols themselves, the *Simu* “Color-eyed” 色目 (Central Asians), Han (Chinese in northern China), and Southerners (Chinese living within the Southern Song Dynasty territory and other ethnic groups, such as Cantonese and Fujanese). The Han skin couldn’t and didn’t quite cover the Southerners yet. That’s why talking about Han hegemony is not enough; there is also a Han *normativity* at work to regulate and discipline the heterogeneous Sinitic body. Essentially, one may say Han normativity passes itself off as Chinese modernity, if one understands modernity through the distinction Zygmunt Bauman makes when he suggests that the two “alternative modes of philosophical and sociological practice classified as ‘modern’ and ‘postmodern’ are best described as *legislative* and *interpretive*.” (Bauman 1992: 115) And I shall pursue this distinction between the legislative modern and the interpretive postmodern to delimit the origin and evolution of Hong Kong cinema.

The Legislative vs. the Interpretive

The legislative project of modernity, armed with a metaphysics of truth, is to judge, to guide, and to enforce the laws of reason. The Modernist *zeitgeist*, according to Jurgen Habermas, is marked by the passage of utopian thought into historical consciousness. “Utopia” has become “a legitimate medium for depicting alternative life possibilities that are seen as inherent in the historical process... A utopian perspective is inscribed within politically active historical consciousness itself.” (Habermas 1989: 50) However, there is no way utopia, in Habermas’ theorizing, is not experienced as both legislative and normative (Zizek 1998: 141).³ In another formulation, Marxist economist Immanuel Wallerstein described the Enlightenment as constituting “a belief in the identity of the modernity of technology and the modernity of liberation” (Wallerstein 1995: 129). Technology in fact belongs more to the provenance of modernization rather than modernity. (Chinese human rights advocates have been pushing for the fifth modernization (democracy) in addition to the party’s “Four Modernizations” slogan.) Leaving the technology question aside will enable one to appreciate Bauman’s apt observation:

There was a genuine affinity between the legislating ambitions of critical philosophy and the *designing intentions of the rising modern state*, as there was a genuine symmetry between the tangle of traditional parochialisms the modern state had to uproot to establish its own supreme and uncontested sovereignty, and the cacophony of ‘dogmatic schools’ that had to be silenced so that the voice of universal and eternal... reason could be heard and its ‘*apodectic certitude*’ could be appreciated (Bauman 1992: 119; added emphasis).⁴

Censorship – the High Priest of Chinese Modernism

The emergence of the modern state in China carries with it a vision of modernity, the agent of which is the newly constructed Han race, and with that a new universal, normative *lingua franca*. Despite the fact that hundreds of dialects, at times totally incomprehensible to one and another, have been spoken in China, Zhang Binglin, the leading anti-Manchu theorist, asserted that a commonly spoken language, binding together the diverse linguistic communities, predated the Chinese writing system in the remote past. Quite naturally, Mandarin, the official language (官話) of the pre-modern imperial government became adopted as the national language in the new epoch of state-making. This was the dialect, regardless of any Chinese person's linguistic background, that allowed access to culture and power in the imperial center. No wonder reformers such as Liang Qichao, Kang Yuwei and the 1911 Xinhai Revolution leader Dr. Sun Yat-sen, all hailing from the gentry class of the Cantonese-speaking southern province of Guangdong, had no quarrel with adopting Mandarin (*guoyu* 國語, the national language, now known in PRC as *putonghua* 普通話 – the common language), even though this dialect of the elite was then alien to a huge swath of the population (Chow 2001: 71–76). As a matter of fact, Mandarin provided the linguistic base for Sun, who spoke it with a heavy accent, to rally the emerging republic with his Han-centric ethno-nationalism (Gladney 1996: 85).⁵

Such is the initial feature of Han normativity that bankrolls the governing *épistémè*, which would have a determining impact on decades of Hong Kong cinema and vernacular culture, of both the Guomindang (GMD, a.k.a. Kuomintang, KMT) and, later, PRC regimes.⁶ Other than its linguistic feature, Han normativity also latches onto domestic Orientalism, and is tendentiously repressive and patriarchal. The first significant mobilization of these Han normative rules, coupled with bio-power's concern for disciplining the body and the mind – with the latter under the aegis of scientism while all the tactics regulating movies were employed under the rubric of *modernity and progressivism* – took place under the GMD Nanjing government (1927–37) and was administered by the National Film Censorship Committee (Yeh and Davis 2005).⁷

I will discuss the three kinds of films targeted by the censors in ascending order of importance for Hong Kong cinema (Xiao 1999: 183–99).⁸

Sex and “Indecency”

Firstly, the censors targeted films with a display of sexuality – this is of course still an ongoing issue in the marketplaces of film exhibition and distribution in various countries and localities. As expected, the bar for indecency was indeed low in this period, with the GMD censors especially allergic to “foreign” influences.⁹ For lack of space here, this paper cannot go into the histories of relaxed standards governing

sex in the cinemas of Hong Kong, Taiwan, and mainland China. But Hong Kong was obviously the one regional Chinese cinema – the least “modernist and progressive” one – that first aspired to filming soft, or proto-soft, porn movies. Interestingly enough, the defining cinematic event in Hong Kong in 2007, the tenth anniversary of its reunification with the PRC, was the showing of the uncut version of Ang Lee’s *Lust, Caution* (2007), which drew droves of mainland cinema-goers into the ex-colony, presumably for a glimpse of the few steamy minutes missing from PRC screens. And not surprisingly, an enterprising producer in Hong Kong created the first Chinese-language 3D porno film, *Sex And Zen: Extreme Ecstasy*, in 2011.

Han Normativity and Dialect Films

The second category of films that became a battleground between producers and the GMD censors during this period was dialect – notably Cantonese – films made in the south, where Hong Kong was already a filmmaking center, with branch studios opened by the Shanghai-based Lianhua and Tianyi. The fact is, Mandarin was rarely spoken and understood in the South in those days. Cantonese-speaking films, never intended for the Northern market, were produced in Guangzhou (Canton) and Hong Kong for both the regional market as well as the Southeast Asian overseas Sinophone markets. But the GMD government attempted to outlaw Cantonese production under a unifying and centralizing nationalist ideology, which judged Cantonese movies as feudalistic and backward.

Meantime, the Northern literati’s condemnation of Hong Kong cinema was unsparing. Shanghai writer Mu Shiying wrote in 1937 that Cantonese cinema was “the biggest joke in the world and greatest humiliation of the human race.” Poshek Fu attributed this disdainful attitude to what he called a “Central Plains Syndrome” (*da zhongyuan xintai* 大中原心態) (Fu 2000: 199), which can only be a description of the geopolitical characteristic – site of the “primordial” origin for the Han Chinese in the northern plain – of Han normativity. This Northern cultural evolutionist and salvationist myth was first promoted during the Republican era, and injected by the communists into their narration of liberation later on.

The battle over dialect cinema was a historical reminder of the centuries-old tension between the North and South, Mandarin and Cantonese, that has persisted up to the controversy surrounding *Vulgaria*. Mark Elliott notes that the adoption of *Han* to denote “the Chinese” was well under way by the mid-sixth century in northern China. Eventually, the words *Nanren* 南人 (Southerner) and *Beiren* 北人 (Northerner) arose and endured for centuries, testifying to “the fundamental divide of north and south, a divide eventually papered over by *Han*,” (Elliott 2012) or the reification of *Han* as both an ethnonym and a homogeneous ethnicity in late Qing.

Yet the ability of the Han appellation to contain the regional and linguistic dichotomy between the North and South seems, well, paper-thin. The southern

province of Guangdong, geographically separated from the Central Plains of China by the Nanling Mountains (南嶺), has repeatedly asserted itself throughout history as an alternative center of the Sinic civilization. Without going too far back in time, from the sixteenth century on, Guangdong, home to Guangzhou, the provincial capital, as well as Macau (the former Portuguese colony), and Hong Kong (the former British colony), has been at the forefront of trading, business development and Western imperialistic encroachment because of its critical geomaritime position.

Today, the Cantonese population is classified as *Han* in the PRC nationality taxonomy, and the Taiping Rebellion as well as Sun Yat-sen's revolutionary enterprise seem to have roped them into the Han polity, at least where anti-Manchuism was concerned. But *Han* is not the Cantonese people's most historically rooted self-appellation, which indeed harks back "to a different 'great' and 'benevolent' past," as an alternative to the Han lineage (Carrico 2012: 37). The Cantonese at times consider themselves the *Yue* (粵) people – the descendants of the ancient *Nanyue* (南粵) kingdom, which supposedly existed at the time of the Han Dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE). Or they call themselves the *Tang* (唐) people, descendants of the fabled Tang Dynasty (618–907 AD).

This Tang identity traveled farther afield as Guangdong became the birthplace of the modern Chinese diaspora – the initial network of overseas Chinese in Indonesia and the Malaysian peninsula originated from here, as did the earliest waves of Chinese migrant laborers (to the US, Canada, and Latin American plantations). Their self-conception of lineage is revealed by the Chinese name of Chinatown – *Tang ren jie* 唐人街 – which christened Chinese immigrant neighborhoods in Southeast Asia and the West. *Tang ren jie* literally means Tang people's street, a reminder of the Cantonese settlers' struggles in homesteading in foreign lands.¹⁰ Somehow this Tang connection prompted Dru Gladney to note "the resurgence of Tang nationalism in southern China, in opposition to the northern Hans." (Gladney 2004: 24)¹¹ Yes, a struggle is still going on, as testified by the *Vulgaria* controversy, but not directly on Tang vs. Han terms. Nevertheless, Gladney is correct about the long-standing historical rivalry and sense of difference – cultural, political and ethnic – between North and South. It is not surprising that Hong Kong cinema, a Southern product that refracted and reflected its bastardization to an unusual degree, was eyed with harsh suspicion from the beginning.

The Magic-spirit-martial-arts (*Shenguai wuxia*)

The third category of films that the GMD government targeted was "magic-spirit-martial-arts films" (*shenguai wuxia dianying* 神怪武俠電影) (Zhang 2001).¹² This line of attack, though related to the other two, is more distinctly executed under the aegis of an "anti-superstition" – and its correlative "anti-feudalistic" – drive, which is another name for assaulting popular religion. This crusade against

popular religion, according to Prasenjit Duara, was a scientism project conducted under “the sign of the modern: the era of self-consciousness and end of contingency.” (Zhang 2001: 86) It began in late Qing and persisted into the Republican era and was prosecuted by the GMD government with renewed rigor.¹³ What no one expected at the time was this censorship practice’s momentous impact on the future of Hong Kong cinema.

Domestically, the censors were assailing a genre that could arguably claim to be the only native genre that Chinese cinema ever produced – the martial arts film, which first emerged in Shanghai in the late 1920s. One can effectively say, apropos of the way Doug Williams characterized the Western as “the ritual altar of American identity,” (Williams 1998: 111) that the martial arts genre constitutes the equivalent ritual altar of Chinese identity. During the Nanjing decade, these were crudely made magic-spirit-martial-arts films, churned out mostly by low-budget companies, causing the mainstream studios to lend tacit support to this ban. The meteoric rise and fall of magic-spirit-martial-arts in Shanghai lasted roughly four years (between 1928 and 1932), during which 240 movies were produced by 50 film companies (Zhang 2001: 46–47). Apparently, the sight of flying warriors, who can mind-control their weapons, unleash invisible magical power, and summon spirits and animals at will, entranced and excited the Shanghai audiences. The trail-blazing entry *The Burning of the Red Lotus Temple* (1928) spawned 18 sequels with the word “burning” (*huoxia* 火燒) embedded in their titles. This “burning” craze alarmed the GMD government and the high-minded literati, including novelist Mao Dun, who rolled out the standard accusation of “escapism” against magic-spirit-martial-arts films. The Ministry of the Interior decreed a ban on films dealing with religious matters in 1928. By 1930, the censors explicitly established guidelines to prohibit films promoting superstition.

Zhang Zhen called the Shanghai *wuxia shenguai* films the “historical ‘preconscious’ of the Hong Kong cinema.” (Zhang 2001: 43) Whatever Zhang’s vaguely Freudian term means, one can probably identify this genre as the repressed unconscious of Chinese modernity, read Han normativity, which excluded and exiled it to the peripheral, “culturally backward” Hong Kong, where the genre returned with a vengeance, morphing into the most salient Chinese exports to global postmodernity. Then, around the millennium, it became the transnational vehicle for Ang Lee, originally from Taiwan, and Zhang Yimou, China’s art house favorite in the West, to garner accolades and handsome profits in the international media markets.

Wang Shuo vs. Jin Yong

Han normativity is not a stable structure; it evolves and latches onto unreflective “common sense,” as defined by Gramsci, and a new nexus of narratives, be it of an aesthetic or ideological variety. What it maintains is its constant invisibility in a

(constructed) racist center, ready to be activated in an apt environment. One may call it a strand of bio-power with a Chinese characteristic.

To further place the *Vulgaria* debate in context, consider another example from more than a decade ago to illustrate the overt manifestation of Han normativity along the north–south axis to uncover its continued relevance and machination: Beijing writer Wang Shuo published in the widely read Beijing *China Youth Daily* in late 1999 an article titled “Reading Jin Yong.”¹⁴ The essay attacks the Hong Kong martial arts novelist Jin Yong (a.k.a. Louis Cha), whose books have been perennial mega-sellers that have been much adapted for TV and film. One should bear in mind that portraying a well-known Jin Yong character can be either a gateway to stardom or a significant career booster. (For example, the Cannes-anointed actor Tony Leung Chiu-wai got his first break through the Jin Yong-based TV serial *The Deer and the Cauldron*, a.k.a. *The Duke of Mount Deer*, in 1984.) And filmmakers that have been attracted to the Jin Yong terrain include Ann Hui (*Romance of Book and Sword*, 1986; *Princess Fragrance*, 1987), Tsui Hark (*The Swordsman*, 1992), and Wong Kar-wai (*Ashes of Time*, 1994).

Perhaps no literary critic would fail to notice the limitations of the martial arts novel as a subgenre of fantasy literature, even though Jin Yong is an acknowledged innovator of the genre and one of the finest prose writers in modern (greater) China. But as John Christopher Hamm points out, Wang lashed out at Jin’s work based on his “re-evocation of the cultural geopolitics of north and south.” (Hamm 2005: 254) Wong opens his salvo by declaring his disdain for the novels of Jin Yong. After “holding his nose” to finish reading one volume of Jin’s extensive corpus, he declares his shock at the work’s one-dimensionality and clichéd, antiquated language, which he indicts for being divorced from reality. Wang vents his rage against what he calls the “Four Great Vulgarities (四大俗) of Our Time”: Jackie Chan films, Jin Yong novels, TV soap operas inspired by the Taiwanese romance writer Qiong Yao, and the “Four Heavenly Kings” of Canton pop – Andy Lau, Aaron Kwok, Leon Lai, and Jacky Cheung, all of whom had significant acting, in addition to singing, careers in Hong Kong cinema from the 1990s on.

Against the “Four Great Vulgarities,” Wang upholds his “Four Mainstays (四大支柱)” – New Era literature, rock and roll, the Beijing Film Academy, and the Beijing Television Arts Center – though he acknowledges that the “Four Mainstays” have been marginalized in this cultural war, i.e. popularity contest, of the 1990s. He laments: “Where the problem lies, I don’t know. It may be that in China whatever is old, naïve, and self-mythologizing has a greater life force than anything else” (Hamm 2005: 251).

Complex cultural politics are involved in order to adjudicate the “vulgarities” that Wang – and now Jasmine Jia – assails, and it is not the intention of this piece to come up with any definite answer, if there is one. What needs to be highlighted is Wang’s marshalling of modernist, rational and progressivist rhetoric – labeling his enemies as “old” and “mythologizing” – in order to denounce Hong Kong, and to a lesser extent Taiwanese, vernacular and film / media culture, which is

obviously set up as “low” vs. the “high” culture of Beijing / mainland literature, rock and roll, TV and the Fifth Generation-and-beyond Beijing Academy-trained directors. And one finds a classic Han normativity paradigm in which Wang frames his verbal strikes: He puts Jin Yong in his (Southern) place by declaring him as, in the opening sentence of his essay, “a Zhejiang native living in Hong Kong.” Then he asserts that Jin’s presumable misrepresentation of Chinese culture stems from the fact that, unlike Wang, who has “lived among Chinese all [his] life,” Jin has not – clearly implying that the Hong Kong people are either non- or sub-Chinese (Hamm 2005: 254).

Jin Yong later retorted by subtly likening Wang to the Cultural Revolution Red Guards, who were determined to destroy the “Four Olds” of their time. However, a fascinating aspect of this debate concerns the ethnic background of Wang Shuo, who is actually a writer of *Manchu descent*. But Wang was brandishing a discursive weapon of demarcating the barbarian, uncivilized Other forged during the murderous anti-Manchu campaign less than a century earlier. As compared to the mythical past evoked in the martial arts universe, Han normativity may be fairly young, or young enough for Wang to use it for ideological and rhetorical combat. At any rate, in this case, one can never doubt the power of Han normativity, which vouchsafes for Wang’s resplendent “Chineseness” to tell off vulgar and inauthentic Hong Kong (and Taiwan).

Hong Kong Cinema – The Postmodern Condition

The previous discussion should be able to delimit the cultural space that Hong Kong cinema / media has inhabited from the beginning and an adequate approach to explore it. As Habermas observes: “postmodern approaches direct their attention primarily to exclusions – to the exclusionary character of every unconsciously operating system of rules that is surreptitiously imposed on speakers and actors.” (Habermas 2001: 147) Wang Shuo’s denunciation of Hong Kong and Taiwan popular culture stands out as one of the more recent and fully articulated confirmations of an (un)consciously operating system (Han normativity) in action, imposing its rules on speakers and actors. On the state policy level, an anti-Cantonese directive finally arrived as a piece of legislation enacted by the Guangdong provincial government that came into effect in March 2012, requiring all TV broadcasts to be conducted in *putonghua*, with exceptions for approved-Cantonese programs. The introduction of the law has sparked widespread protest in Guangzhou since 2010, though so far it has not been actively enforced (AFP 2010).

The trajectory of the exclusion of Hong Kong from Chinese (Han normative) culture places Hong Kong cinema solidly in a postmodern condition at the outset. Owing to the spilling of the British colonial government’s laissez-faire economic policy into the cultural realm, Hong Kong films were not too closely disciplined

with a modernist, state-building rigor by their colonial masters, who patrolled issues of decency, violence, and macro-politics that might affect diplomatic relationships. Otherwise, the colonial government deliberately depoliticized the social and cultural realm to the best of its ability.

If Bauman's distinction between the modern and the postmodern draws upon the binarism of the legislative versus the interpretive, Hong Kong cinema's inherent *modus operandi* in an interpretative state was never a deliberate choice. A confluence of factors has fed Hong Kong cinema's vitality through most of the twentieth century and made it fulfill unwittingly postmodernity's *effect*, if not mission, as envisioned by Bauman: "postmodernity can be seen as restoring to the world what modernity, presumptuously, had taken away; as a *re-enchantment* of the world that modernity tried hard to *disenchant*." (Bauman 1992: x)

I can think of a couple of Hong Kong directors whose creative paths underline the parallel situations between Hong Kong and China in the modern vs. postmodern (not in a temporal sense) divide. During the decade of the Great Proletariat Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), when the Chinese mainland was embroiled in a paroxysm of disenchantment – to relinquish and destroy its past under the modernist ethos of Marxian universal emancipation – directors Li Han-hsiang and King Hu, both in their prime, were hitting their strides in Hong Kong.¹⁵ Li found his *métier* in making historical costumed dramas. Imperfect and uneven as his output was, the charge against him – of being indulgent of "antiquery" and other traditional refinements and artifices – may actually identify his zest, no doubt half of the time misguided, to re-enchant the past. (Wong 2007; Fu 2008) King Hu, probably the first major *wuxia* / *kung fu* auteur, tapped into the plastic resources afforded by Peking Opera, hence scouting Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Korea for stunning locales in order to conjure a creative cinematic re-enactment of what he conceived as *the spirituality of absence* (*kong ling* 空靈) evoked by classical Chinese poetry and painting. His is a quixotic and highly accomplished attempt, in exile, to re-enchant what has been egregiously disenchanted by the onslaught of excessive, self-immolating modernity in the mainland.

Vulgaria: Counteracting Han-Normativity

At this point, the idea of a postmodern Hong Kong cinema being the enchanter, and a modernist PRC cinema as disenchanter maybe too simplistic a dichotomy. The PRC has now become adept in churning out blockbuster hits that dwarf Hong Kong productions within the mainland's own tightly controlled market. The censorship system installed by the GMD Nanjing government in the 1920s and 30s has now taken a complex, but even more non-transparent and arbitrary form in today's China. Its restrictive and horrendous impact on the commercial prospect of any Chinese (and increasingly foreign) production, has drawn protests from even

veterans who have gamed the system successfully. Such filmmakers include Feng Xiaogang, known as China's Spielberg and presumably a good friend of Pang Ho-cheung. Fung has built his career mostly on light comedic fares, such as *The Dream Factory* (1997), *Be There or Be Square* (1998), *Big Shot's Funeral* (2001), *If You Are the One* (2008). In April, 2013, while delivering his thank-you speech in accepting the "Director of the Year" award from the China Film Directors Guild, he stopped mid-track to riff on the "tremendous torment" the censors have caused mainland filmmakers (Osnos 2013).

Nowadays, any commercial Hong Kong production with any interest in being released in the mainland market, which is becoming harder and harder to ignore, will have to go through a "co-production" deal involving working with the PRC censors. As much as Jasmine Jia recognized this onerous "co-production" situation as pivotal to the dramatic interest of *Vulgaria*, she didn't seem to consider it enough of a sanitizing, harshly normative burden to provoke the film's blasphemous skewering of the mainland folks and its debilitating system. Jia might have mentioned in passing the kind of political anger manifest in Hong Kongers' massive protest, in September 2012, against the Chinese patriotic school curriculum proposed by the mainland-controlled government, but she zeroed in mainly on the presumable economic inferiority complex of Hong Kongers. For her, Hong Kong's resentment against big-spending mainland tourists and speculators caused *Vulgaria* to "trash" them unfairly and *irrationally*. Director Pang Ho-cheung didn't take Jia's criticism of *Vulgaria* lying down. In response to Jia's essay, he wrote on his Facebook page:

Of course, Hong Kong's native character is more than vulgarity... I believe the spirit of Hong Kong lies in its pluralism and freedom of speech... But if you think vulgarity is trash, I consider the repression of vulgarity means embarking on a downward spiral in which the freedom of speech and creativity will be chipped away.

What is worth noting is the fact that, after lambasting *Vulgaria* as a telling symptom of Hong Kong's "angst and inferiority complex," and for its inability to "construct a new subjectivity / autonomy," Jasmine Jia didn't offer any cinema model to lead *Vulgaria* and its ilk to the right path. Since she is known to have attended Beijing Film Academy, one of the Four Mainstays that Wang Shuo upheld, was she aware of the Wang-Jin Yong debate? Could she be thinking about the early works from the Fifth Generation filmmakers as counter examples to *Vulgaria*? Why wouldn't she mention PRC's underground film scene, which challenges official limits and narratives? Or why didn't she mention a more positive example, e.g. Ann Hui's award-winning *A Simple Life* (2011) to show that Hong Kong culture does have something to offer? In lieu of that, her piece does smack of a "Northern" sense of superiority and aggressive "defensiveness," since the PRC is indeed a repressive and authoritarian government, and quite a few of the mainland tourists are abusive, offensive and causing tremendous hardship – such as the woefully

inflated real estate market – in Hong Kong lives. Considering that context, *Vulgaria* has become a specimen of a critical geo-cinema vis-a-vis the PRC.

Let's take a look at *Vulgaria*'s creative strategy. I've discussed elsewhere Han-centric Chinese movies' penchant for trans-racial casting – using Han actor to play non-Han character – so as to either exaggerate stereotypes or rob the racial other character's edge of alienness (Chan 2008: 172). *Vulgaria* turned the tables by adopting the same transracial / ethnic strategy so as to intensify its local / Hong Kong / minority, sub- or off-Han identity against a mainland system that it resented and ridiculed. The PRC backer in the film, Brother Tyrannosaurus, is played by – instead of a mainland or Mandarin-speaking actor – local Canton-pop singer Ronald Cheng Chung-kei (see Figure 9.1), who delivered a perfectly chiseled caricature of a volatile *nouveau riche* gangster wanting to make a film with his favorite oldtime porn screen diva Siu Yam-yam (see Figure 9.2), an aging woman entering her 70s.¹⁶ Traditionally, Hong Kong movies present a repulsive mainland character as coming from the North. But not here. Brother Tyrannosaurus is, played trans-ethnically, a loudmouth gangster from Guangxi, a southern province west of Guangdong. Guangxi is also a mostly Cantonese-speaking province, sporting its distinct accent. The film's most "objectionable" joke actually derives from the pronunciation of the word for woman in accented Cantonese – *nu* – which can also mean a mule. The film's most outrageously funny and vulgar details, therefore, concern Brother Ty's favorite food – cow's vagina – and sex partner – a veritable mule (see Figure 9.3). What's more, Ty would impose his idiosyncratic appetites for food and sex on his poor Hong Kong producer and the porno flick that is being bankrolled by him. This unique creative maneuvering allowed Pang to parody the mainland *nouveau riche* through the



Figure 9.1 Chapman To (right) plays To Wai-cheung, a down-on-his-luck Hong Kong producer, who seeks backing from Brother Ty, played by Ronald Cheng Chung-kei, a *nouveau riche* PRC gangster with outré taste in sex and food in *Vulgaria* (Pang Ho-cheung, 2012).

film's linguistic, anti-Han-normative, defiance – parading Cantonese foul language for fun and spite. And of course, its political implication has been foregrounded – the regional, the vernacular, sex, or “questionable” sexuality won't meet the PRC's stifling co-production censorship requirement. (If Jia really thinks that bestiality is merely vulgar and debasing (of mainlanders), she should see Edward Albee's serious treatment of it in his play, *The Goat*.)

Vulgaria is perhaps politically reactionary in other ways, such as peppering its dialogue with homophobic jokes, as well as its portrayal of its only “good” and kind-hearted female character as an over-eager bimbo who schemes to get an acting part by performing inventive oral sex on all the male film professionals she can get hold of. *Vulgaria* is what it is – an escapist comedic entertainment. But it



Figure 9.2 Siu Yam-yam (second from left), Hong Kong's porn screen diva in the 1970s and 1980s, playing herself in *Vulgaria* (Pang Ho-cheung, 2012).



Figure 9.3 Questionable sexuality – the mule bride in *Vulgaria* (Pang Ho-cheung, 2012).

is also a smart film arriving at the most sensitive moment of a socio-political tug-of-war between Hong Kong and the mainland, the South and the North, since the inception of Chinese cinema(s). has become a specimen of a critical geo-cinema vis-à-vis the PRC

Conclusion

Hong Kong has always been a haven for freedom of speech on Chinese soil, first because of its status as a British colony, then after the 1997 changeover, as a Special Administrative Region under the “One Country, Two Systems” formula. Serious filmmakers have not been hesitant to use the locale to create works with discourses meant to impact, from diaspora, the fate of the modern Chinese nation. Important films in that vein include *Sorrows of the Forbidden City* (1948), directed by the Shanghai emigree director Zhu Shilin, and *China Behind* (1974), the first Chinese-language movie about the Great Proletariat Cultural Revolution, by Tang Shu-shuen, a trail-blazing independent woman filmmaker. The 1989 Tian’anmen crackdown has left an indelible strand in Hong Kong cinema, to the extent that from 1989 to 1997, a meta-narrative that lamented the soon-to-be-former-colony’s future while being subtly critical of mainland hegemony ran through Hong Kong cinema (Chan 2000). Even as Hong Kong cinema has been in serious decline since the mid-1990s, that critical edge has persisted, not only in independent works such as Fruit Chan’s *Durian Durian* (2000), but in mainstream fare such as Johnnie To’s two-part *Election* films (*Election* [2005] and *Election 2*, or *Triad Election* [2006]). *Vulgaria* is the latest high-profile cinematic skirmish between Hong Kong and China and is unlikely to be the last.

Notes

- 1 Jasmine Jia (Jia Xuanning)’s “A Glimpse of Hong Kong Cinema’s Angst through *Vulgaria*” won the top, “Golden” honor of Hong Kong Arts Development Council’s inaugural Arts Critic Prize of 2013. Her Chinese essay is archived at the HKADC website (<http://www.criticsprize.hk/result.php#jump22>), and I’m using my own English translation here.
- 2 The emergence and construction of this Han ethnos has been much discussed by the school of New Qing studies scholars such as Pamela Crossley, Mark Elliott, and Ed Rhoads. For a discussion of the impact of this ethnic / racial imaginary on Chinese cinema, see Chan (2008).
- 3 According to Slavoj Žižek, the opposition as constructed by Habermas, notably in his *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures* (1990), is “between modernism (defined by its claim to a universality of reason, its refusal of the authority of tradition,

its acceptance of rational argument as the only way to defend conviction, its ideal of a communal life guided by mutual understanding and recognition and by the absence of constraint) and postmodernism (defined as the ‘deconstruction’ of this claim to universality, from Nietzsche to ‘poststructuralism,’ the endeavour to prove that this claim to universality is necessarily, constitutively ‘false,’ that it masks a particular network of power relations; that universal reason as such, in its very form, ‘repressive,’ and ‘totalitarian’; that its truth claim is nothing but an effect of a series of rhetorical figure.” (Žizek 1998: 141).

- 4 *Intimations of Postmodernity*, p. 119. The state-making affinity with the impulse of modernism makes it unsurprising that critics have hung the blame of fascism, Nazism, and Soviet totalitarianism on the Enlightenment and modernist meta-narratives.
- 5 It is believed that the idea of Han *minzu* (Han race) came handily to Dr. Sun for him to overcome Northerners’ distrust of a radical – revolutionary – movement originating from the South. Han-nationalism, said Dru Gladney, “was a brilliant attempt to mobilize other non-Cantonese, especially northern Mandarin speakers, and the powerful Zhejiang and Shanghainese merchants, into one overarching national group against the Manchu and other foreigners threatening China.”
- 6 I’m referring to the Foucaultian *épistémè* (*The Order of Things*), which denotes the historical *a priori* that grounds knowledge and its discourses within a particular epoch.
- 7 That the idea of modernism has become literally “legislative” in the following discussion is underscored by the distinct variety of a state-sponsored modernism, which, as the Guomindang party carried it into Taiwan after 1949, manifested in the suppression of the Taiwan dialect before the 1980s.
- 8 Much of the information about the practices of the GMD censors during this period came from Zhiwei Xiao’s paper, “Constructing a New National Culture: Film Censorship and the Issues of Cantonese Dialect, Superstition and Sex in the Nanjing Decade.”
- 9 Therefore, Euro-American movies that were banned ran the gamut from *Ecstasy* (1933), an infamous piece of erotica of its time from Czechoslovakia, to the Paramount romantic comedy *Top Hat* (1935), featuring Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers as a physically-too-intimate *dancing* couple. Where domestic movies are concerned, scenes with the “un-Chinese” practice of kissing risked being condemned by critics for being stiffly performed, which was true, or demanded to be cut by the censors. A movie titled *The Worldly Immortals* (1934) ran into trouble because of a “lewd” dance scene, in which female dancers have exposed their bras and panties. The censors were also interested in cultivating leading men and women with wholesome, athletic appeal, as indicated by its banning of *A Model Youth* (1935) which had a male lead whose image is considered “effeminate” – *youtou fenmian*, which literally means “with oily hair and powdery face,” but implying men who apply make-up, are overly well-groomed, and dandyish-seeming.
- 10 Another linguistic trace of that regional identity can be found in the Cantonese dialect for Amer- or Eur-asian Chinese – *boontongfan*, which means half Tang and half Caucasian.
- 11 Gladney, 2004, p. 24.
- 12 For simplicity, I adopt Zhang Zhen’s translation of “magic spirit” to encompass the meanings of *shen* (神) and *guai* (怪). See Zhang (2001).

- 13 During the Nanjing decade, even an anti-Christian, xenophobic component entered this campaign. Western films banned in this period included *The Ten Commandments* (1923), *Ben-Hur* (1926), *Alice in Wonderland* (1933), and *Frankenstein* (1931). The first two were denounced because of its *shen* (gods and deities), while the latter two were reprimanded for its *guai* (the demonic, the magical) association.
- 14 Wang Shuo is best known for his novel *Ferocious Animals*, which has been adapted by actor / director Jian Wen into *In the Heat of the Sun* (1996), which channels the rowdy and “fun-filled” memories of the Cultural Revolution through the eyes of a group of privileged adolescents.
- 15 Both also pursued their careers in Taiwan, but Hong Kong was an important “nourishing,” for good or bad, environment for their careers.

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Commentary

Critical Geographies

Stephen Yiu-wai Chu

This section has discussed the critical geographies of Hong Kong cinema, going beyond the confines of the city, its identity, and its thoroughly analyzed relationship with Hollywood and with China. These chapters focus not on the filmic representations of space but on the new geopolitics reconfigured by the rapidly changing mediascape in the new millennium. Hong Kong's unique history and geographical location as a region marginal from China, an imperial outpost, a British colony, and a trading center enabled it to develop into a filmmaking capital. For more than a century Hong Kong cinema has been famous for its distinct identity internationally and domestically. In recent years the economic geography of Chinese cultural industries has changed drastically, exerting a profound impact on not only Hong Kong cinema but also Hong Kong culture and society. On the one hand, the film industries of Asian countries have begun gathering momentum; on the other hand, the field of cultural production in Asia has been reconfigured by the unexpectedly swift growth of the mainland market. According to the *Baseline Study on Hong Kong's Creative Industries*, a study commissioned by the Central Policy Unit and conducted by the Centre for Cultural Policy Research of the University of Hong Kong (2003: 107–108): “Hong Kong is now challenged by other Asian players in the field. Korean film is renowned for much variety as well as quality of production lately, and their exports to the mainland are competitive. Other regional markets meanwhile witness the trend of localization of film services.” At the same time, “[t]he gradual opening of mainland's film market is indeed the future for Hong Kong” (107). The changing geographies at this particular juncture should contribute an important dimension to the study of Hong Kong cinema.

“Of all the affairs we participate in, with or without interest, the groping quest for a new way of life is the only thing that remains really exciting,” Guy Debord wrote (1955 / 2008: 23) in his monumental “Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography.” This is equally true of Hong Kong cinema, which is also desperate to find a new way of life. Debord turned to psychogeography because aesthetics and other disciplines had proved glaringly inadequate in this regard. While I

believe that the aesthetics and other studies of film have something to contribute to the quest for a new way of life, the critical geographies of Hong Kong cinema do have an important dimension to offer to the study of not only Hong Kong movies but also the city per se. In *Spaces of Capital*, a seminal work in the field of critical geography, David Harvey (2001: x) noted that his project centered on “the role of geographical knowledges in the perpetuation of political-economic power structures and in transforming by opposition the political economic order.” The most important transformation of political-economic power structures in regard to Hong Kong, if not the world as well, is the rapid rise of China and its soft power in the new millennium. Hong Kong, having a historical role as a meeting place of East and West, lost its unique, prolific place between China and the world shortly after its reversion to China. When Ackbar Abbas suggested that the possibility of a new Hong Kong subjectivity after 1997 would be predicated on a “process of negotiating the mutations and permutations of colonialism, nationalism, and capitalism” (cited in Chapter 5 by Olivia Khoo), he probably could not have predicted that nationalism and capitalism would become hopelessly entangled for Hong Kong, as it has been forced to lean towards the enormous market on the mainland.

Before “going north” became the seeming panacea for the problems of the shrinking market, Hong Kong filmmakers tried exploring inter-Asia possibilities in the aftermath of the Asian financial crisis. Hollywood has long been the dream market of Hong Kong cinema. Notwithstanding successful transitions including, among others, Jackie Chan, Chow Yun-fat, and John Woo, Hong Kong cinema came to realize that going west to Hollywood was a venture restricted to a few selected superstars. At the turn of the new millennium, inter-Asia collaborations appeared to be the future of Hong Kong cinema. As lucidly noted by Cindy Hing-yuk Wong in Chapter 8, uncovering the expansion of creative cinematic geographies of the world through programming in the Hong Kong International Film Festival (HKIFF), the Festival “acts not only as the Western gateway for the East, but also as [the] Northernmost point of the (Asian) South and regional centre for wider and less than cogent fostering of the Asian century.” After the opening up of the mainland market, the role of Hong Kong between East and West and North and South has changed, leading to a new strategy of promoting the Hong Kong brand, which, if successful, “can differentiate itself in becoming the agency of such trends and markets in ‘the East’ or ‘Asia.’” The strategy of the HKIFF – in conjunction with co-curricular fora like Asian Film Financing Forum – falls in line with the entire agenda of the Hong Kong government to brand Hong Kong as “Asia’s World City,” which, as noted by Wong, has been framed by the two contrasting tourist discourses that the Hong Kong Tourism Board circulates for mainland and Western tourists, “portraying the city both as a modern Western capitalist consumerist landscape and an exotic stage for Oriental tradition.” However, the remarkable rise of the Korean film industry, together with the swift development of the

Chinese market, has made Hong Kong filmmakers realize that they are no longer at the center of Asian cinema. The political economic order shaped by the new geopolitics of Asian and Chinese cultural industries has proved to be too strong for Hong Kong cinema to transform.

Through her meticulous analysis of the Hong Kong body vis-à-vis exotic Asian bodies, Olivia Khoo examined its reconfiguration within a broader regional frame. This body, as argued in Chapter 5, “is being transformed by new representational tactics and debates into the twenty-first century that are shifting the terms of reference outside of the Hong Kong–China and Hong Kong-and-the-West double-bind where it has remained for some time.” While the three examples used in the chapter, *Shinjuku Incident* (2009), *After This Our Exile* (2006), and *Himalaya Singh* (2005), “locate and imagine a complex, heterogeneous Asia through a range of industrial and representational tactics,” it also has to be noted that they did not fully succeed in going beyond the Hong Kong–China and Hong Kong-and-the-West double-bind. In the inter-Asia collaboration of *Shinjuku Incident*, what the lead actor and producer Jackie Chan wanted to convey to the Chinese diaspora is the message that “no country is like home” – to borrow Khoo’s words, “nationalist politics remain insurmountable.” As astutely noted in Khoo’s chapter, the film “forecloses the possibility of imagining Asia differently, in more inclusive regional terms,” and in this special context Hong Kong bodies are literally “out of place” not only in the enticing metropolis of modern-day Tokyo in the film, but also in Asian cinema in reality. Patrick Tam’s award-winning *After This Our Exile*, an “Asian film” as defined by the director, makes “secreted, oblique references to a regional ‘home’ for Hong Kong cinema within Southeast Asia,” but the alternative “home” in the end lies not in Asia but in the mainland. Despite its great success at local as well as Asian film festivals (Best Picture, Best Director, Best Screenplay, Best Supporting Actor, and Best New Performer in the 26th Hong Kong Film Awards; Best Feature Film, Best Actor, and Best Supporting Actor in the 43rd Golden Horse Awards; Best Artistic Contribution and Best Asian Film in the Tokyo International Film Festival), this film remains, so far, the most recent work of Tam. Meanwhile, after the release of *Himalaya Singh*, the director Wai Ka-fai and his business partner, Johnnie To, briefly returned to the local Hong Kong market with *The Shopaholics* (2006), *The Mad Detective* (2007), and *Written By* (2009) before formally entering the mainland market with *Don’t Go Breaking My Heart* (a.k.a. *Single Men and Women*) (2011). *Don’t Go Breaking My Heart*, according to Wai, was Milkyway Image’s first attempt to test the waters of the mainland market (Wei 2011). I have argued elsewhere that the career of Peter Ho-sun Chan, who is famous for his pioneering imaginaries in developing his film career across boundaries, represents an exemplary story of the success of the Hong Kong mode of flexible identity: from Hong Kong to Hollywood to Asia to the mainland (Chu 2013: 109–110). Following Lai-kwan Pang’s observation that “local Hong Kong becomes most concrete when Hong Kong becomes most transnational and dispersed” (cited in Chapter 5), Khoo

brings forth “another perspective on the transnationalization and dispersal of local Hong Kong identity... through the cinema’s active participation in a regional conceptualization of Asia.” With the benefit of hindsight, it is safe to say that Hong Kong cinema has not become more transnational; on the contrary, it became more “national” after its active participation in a regional conceptualization of Asia fell short of expectations, at least in terms of the box office.

That the “early optimism towards pan-Asian success in the cinema has not been fully realized” (Khoo) can be attributed to the new cultural geopolitics over the past decade. Wong’s inspiring analysis of the HKIFF (Chapter 8) is illuminating in this regard. The HKIFF, as a platform that “premieres the breadth of Chinese cinema and showcases Asian talents,” has been facing a new situation in the new millennium. “HKIFF maps dual functions that reflect – or perhaps invert – Hong Kong’s historical role as a meeting place of East and West,” noted Wong, and “the East of the HKIFF encompasses the local (Hong Kong), the national (China), the cultural (greater China), and a wider political economic sense of Asia.” In addition, “the ability of the HKIFF to bring Asian cinema, more specifically Chinese cinema and Hong Kong cinema, to the West defines its unique cinematic geography, not unlike the city’s traditional role of an entrepôt, or a door to the East.” According to John Agnew’s nuanced account of the critical geopolitics reshaped by an emerging China, “recent Chinese economic development is seen in China as largely the product of globalization rather than national development per se,” and the growing prosperity of China depends on its participation in global and regional institutions that facilitate its growth (Agnew 2010: 578). In this special context, China does not rely solely on the entrepôt of Hong Kong to export its culture any more, and this has placed Hong Kong into a difficult situation. On the one hand, the HKIFF is still promoting world-class films and Asian talents under the European gaze; on the other hand, “the changing roles of China in the twenty-first century continue to remap relationships.” As cited in Chapter 8, the occasion of the 35th HKIFF (2011) identified China as the “800-pound dragon,” and “[e]veryone at the festival, filmmakers and producers alike, seemed to be talking about it.” The Festival highlighted Wai Ka-fai as the featured director alongside Kuei Chih-Hung, a Shaw Brothers studio director in the 1970s. One of the opening films, *Don’t Go Breaking My Heart*, was provided by Hong Kong, but, as mentioned above, it was ironically considered an attempt by Johnnie To and Wai Ka-fai to test the waters of the mainland market.

Chapter 6, by Kimburley Wing-yee Choi and Steve Fore is a good example of showing the inclusion of mainland China in an expanded geography. The animation series *McDull* was famously local when it first attracted the limelight. As clearly outlined in Chapter 6, the shift of the series from “100% Hong Kong” to a Hong Kong–China co-production tells an interesting story about the delocalization and relocalization of Hong Kong culture. The first episode, *My Life as McDull* (2001), was widely recognized as a representation of local Hong Kong culture, thanks to, for instance, the punning games with Cantonese, Putonghua, and

English. If *My Life as McDull* is seen as a chronicle of McDull's life from birth to adulthood, a mid-life identity crisis surfaced in *McDull Prince de la Bun* (2004). Through the city's ongoing struggles with identity formation, *Prince* managed to show, as argued by the authors, "local uniqueness and specificity and its construct- edness." But just five years later, *McDull Kung Fu Ding Ding Dong* (2009) had to face the music, delocalizing itself to go north in the age of mainland-Hong Kong co-productions. It is easy to understand that in the northern venture, local Hong Kong *cha chen teng* food such as a pineapple bun was replaced by Wuhan noodles and duck neck, and the non-translatable Cantonese slang and puns were consid- erably reduced. The function of the first two episodes as powerful reservoirs of local cultural memory was jeopardized by the audience's demand for and / or official censorship of a different market. Despite the disapproval of local Hong Kong film critics, McDull's northern journey went on in *McDull: The Pork of Music* (2012). However, due to the changing role Hong Kong has played in co-productions since 2009 (see below), Hong Kong filmmakers have realized the importance of relocalization in co-productions. *The Pork of Music* preserved a number of identifi- able Hong Kong elements. In their perceptive account of the songs used in the movie, the authors touched upon the use of Hong Kong pop songs. In the midst of different types of songs, including Western classical music, a British folk song, a Japanese pop song, and a Taiwanese Southern Min folk song, *Love in the Snow*, a golden Cantopop hit in the 1980s originally sung by Michael Kwan and also performed by the legendary Leslie Cheung, played an exceedingly important part in the movie. This "relocalization" – or the injection of local elements into co-productions – was part of Hong Kong filmmakers' test of the supposedly more relaxed attitudes of the mainland censors with regard to co-productions. In this regard, Choi and Fore made an important observation in their chapter: "[t]he dynamics of the McDull co-productions have not led simply to renationalization or delocalization (the effacement of 'Hong Kong' as a place)." For Choi and Fore, what has to be underlined in the series is "a disruption of place-based identity, a confusion of local boundaries, and a multiplication of horizontality and the trans- local imaginary without losing sight of the importance of place-making in people's lives." In other words, it is the fluid and expressionistic portrayal of Hong Kong life that matters.

In fact, Hong Kong cinema is not unfamiliar with co-productions. Chapter 7, by David Desser, re-historicizes and theorizes the transnational making of Hong Kong cinema by considering its connections with Japan since the 1960s. The chapter's conclusion will prove to be very important for the future of Hong Kong cinema: "How much of the Japanese presence in these films accounts for their global popularity is debatable. Not debatable is the manner in which Japan underscored Hong Kong's rise to global cinematic success less than two decades after their march to international recognition began." Desser reminds the audi- ence that the globalization of Hong Kong cinema was realized owing to the "Japan Option" – "[the] former East Asian enemy provided a number of object

lessons that ultimately enabled the Hong Kong Chinese cinema to surpass their former role model in commercial success and transnational influence.” In a sense, Hong Kong has taken up the role of Japan in mainland–Hong Kong co-productions. If “the dominance of Japan in the early days of the Asian Film Festival clearly encouraged MP&GI and Shaw Brothers to upgrade their films both technically and narratively in terms of story and characterization,” as argued by Desser, the production of Chinese cinema has been upgraded through mainland–Hong Kong co-productions. In less than a decade the mainland film industry has matured enough to surpass Hong Kong in commercial success and transnational influence. As I noted elsewhere (Chu 2013: 111), Yu Dong, president of the Beijing Polybona Films Distribution Co. Ltd., made it clear that “2009 marked a new beginning of an era dominated by mainland productions,” and “Hong Kong filmmakers are commissioned to produce films of mainland themes and stories.” It should be against this backdrop that the Hong Kong director Pang Ho-cheung’s *Weibo* – the Chinese version of Twitter – remark on co-productions is to be understood: “I am not opposing co-productions, but objected to Hong Kong only having co-productions” (Pang 2013). Pang made this remark after his *Vulgaria* (2012) was lambasted by mainland critic Jasmine Jia in her award-winning essay as a work of unerring bad taste. In his inspiring analysis questioning Han Chinese normativity, Evans Chan (Chapter 9) puts *Vulgaria*’s presentation of Hong Kong–PRC relations in the context of a long history of skirmishes between the Sinitic North and South. According to Jia, the demonization of mainland Chinese in *Vulgaria* can be attributed to “the Hong Kongers’ inability to adjust themselves to their reversed role vis-à-vis the mainland.” But as Chan argued, “The trajectory of the exclusion of Hong Kong from Chinese (Han normative) culture places Hong Kong cinema solidly in a postmodern condition at the outset,” and “the idea of a postmodern Hong Kong cinema being the enchanter, and a modernist PRC cinema as disenchanter may be too simplistic a dichotomy.”

Chan’s perceptive account has brought forth another interesting example related to the cultural conflict between the mainland and Hong Kong. In 1999, Wang Shuo, an influential Beijing writer, branded Jackie Chan films, Jin Yong novels, TV soap operas inspired by the Taiwanese romance writer Qiong Yao, and the Cantonese popular songs of Four Heavenly Kings as the “four great vulgarities.” Chan uses this as an example to show how Wang used resplendent “Chineseness” to berate vulgar and inauthentic Hong Kong (and Taiwan). Interestingly, the four great vulgarities have been incorporated into mainland culture in the new millennium. Jackie Chan has shifted his focus from Hollywood to the mainland; Jin Yong novels and Qiong Yao’s romances have generated a hot wave in the mainland television industry; the Four Heavenly Kings have been playing a series of concerts in various mainland cities; and Cantopop has now been taken over by Mandopop. Hong Kong (and Taiwanese)

vulgarities have become an integral part of the mainland culture, so to speak. Jia's critique of Hong Kong cinema can be seen as a similar endeavor to keep Chinese culture "pure" by expelling the inauthentic and vulgar Hong Kong (and Taiwan) in the new cultural geographical configuration of the new millennium – in this sense, the disease originated outside mainland China. Chan's conclusion is particularly illuminating in this context: *Vulgaria*, "a smart film arriving at the most sensitive moment of a socio-political tug-of-war between Hong Kong and the mainland, the South and the North, since the inception of Chinese cinema(s)...has become a specimen of a critical geo-cinema vis-à-vis the PRC." This observation echoes well with the notion of Sinophone cinemas, developed from the emerging field of Sinophone studies, that suggests a methodological shift "to re-engage new sites of localization, multilingualism, and difference that have emerged in Chinese film studies but that are not easily contained by the notion of diaspora" (Yue and Khoo 2014: 5). According to the founding theoretician Shu-mei Shih, Sinophone, a network of places of cultural production outside China and on the margins of China and Chineseness, is a method that "unsettles binaries [of Western theory vs. Chinese reality] and offers in their place the far richer potential of multidirectional critiques" (Shih 2010: 482). Although Hong Kong cinema has lost its in-betweenness, it can still exert its function as a site for multidirectional critiques. Roger Garcia rightly underlined the importance of re-thinking our map of the world in terms of cinema. Hong Kong has to "seize on those moments when markets emerged [such as South America and other parts of Asia], in terms of cinema," according to him, and make good use of its position to "bring people together to take advantage of those opportunities" (cited in Chapter 8). Equally important to audience-building is the rethinking of the position of Hong Kong cinema, which is well-placed to serve as a site of multidirectional imaginaries, in the map of the world in term of critical geographies.

To conclude, the chapters in this section have had a double objective: to understand the new configuration of critical geographies of Hong Kong and Asian cinema and to designate "critical geographies" as a method. "Critical geographies" as a discipline emerged in the age of globalization to stress the role of dominance in the production of space, challenging and resisting dominant meanings as a response to concerns of both cultural homogenization and neocolonialism. As these challenges and resistances "occur in space and many are fundamentally about space itself," to borrow the words from the conference "Constructed Places / Contested Spaces: Critical Geographies in Korea" held on 14–16 May 2004, at the University of California, Los Angeles, "the way that people interpret the space around them is a critical issue in our understanding of the current changes in Asia" (cited from <http://www.international.ucla.edu/article.asp?parentid=4877>; see also Tangherlini and Yea 2008). The way that Hong Kong cinema transforms with the space around it could also shed light on

our understanding of the current changes in Asian cinema. The purposes of the Hong Kong Critical Geography Group listed on their website can in this sense be applicable to the study of Hong Kong cinema:

- 1 In search of alternatives of Hong Kong;
- 2 To challenge the status quo and identify the possible measure of transforming Hong Kong; and
- 3 To investigate the appropriate modes of thinking about space and time that can inform our practice (cited from <http://www.hkcgg.net>).

This has come to a time when Hong Kong cinema has to search for alternatives and identify possible measures of transforming itself. As aptly put by Jennifer Robinson (2006: 142) in her *Ordinary Cities*, which guides readers to imagine the possibilities of multiple becomings of cities, “Without a strong sense of the city’s potential dynamism and creativity, imaginations about urban futures are truncated, perhaps by consigning futures to the limited imagination of developmentalist interventions, or through a narrow focus on globalizing sectors of the economy.” This can be applied almost verbatim to the situation of Hong Kong cinema. One of the most important lessons told by critical geographers is that “all cities ought to have the right to shape distinctive futures whatever power position they hold in relation to other places” (Fraser 2006: 195). The chapters in this section have contributed important insights into how to understand and shape the future of Hong Kong cinema.

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Part III

The Gendered Body and Queer Configurations

Feminism, Postfeminism, and Hong Kong Women Filmmakers¹

Gina Marchetti

Hong Kong boasts some of the most visible, vivacious, and cosmopolitan women filmmakers working today. They run the gamut from the commercial (MTVs as well as popular features) to the edges of the avant-garde and the vanguard of political documentaries. Their ranks include women representing different generations, educational backgrounds, sexual orientations, and political perspectives, and many have established international reputations, including Ann Hui, Clara Law, Mabel Cheung, Tammy Cheung, Carol Lai, Barbara Wong, Yau Ching, Mak Yan-yan, Ivy Ho, Jessey Tsang Tsui-shan, Louisa Wei, Angie Chen, Heiward Mak, and Emily Tang, among others. Some identify as “feminists,” others prefer not to be associated with any political label; however, they all share the challenges facing their gender as Hong Kong experiences the twenty-first century as a “special administrative region” of the People’s Republic of China. Virtually all of these women filmmakers take up issues involving the status of women in the HKSAR and their relationship to global cultural norms. Looking at their films juxtaposed with current feminist understandings of gender, sexuality, and women’s roles in contemporary postmodern society adds an important piece to the complex puzzle of Hong Kong film culture after 1997.

As Hong Kong has changed dramatically at the turn of the millennium, feminism has undergone equally striking transformations since the “Second Wave” women’s movement of the post-World War II era. Buoyed by stunning triumphs including the 1950 Marriage Law in China, the Civil Rights and Equal Pay Acts and abortion reforms in the United States, and various initiatives by the United Nations on women’s rights, some women no longer see a need for an organized women’s movement, while others have become alienated by feminist identification with

Western values, implicit homophobia, racism, and ethnocentrism, as well as a middle-class sensibility that does not address the concerns of working-class, poor, and third-world women. As postmodernism confronts Enlightenment understandings of politics based on unified identities, “grand narratives,” like feminism, which promise “liberation” for some based on the oppression of others, have fallen out of favor. However, despite the sustained critique of identity politics and poststructuralist suspicions of essentialism, feminism continues to speak to women as “Third Wave” and, in Hong Kong’s case, “post-1980s” generations of younger women agitate for gender equality.

What Gayatri Spivak (1990) calls “strategic essentialisms” continue to be important to women – particularly postcolonial women – in their encounters with institutions (like the film industry) that have traditionally excluded them. Gender, of course, is less an “essence” and more of a position (within a social structure) as well as a process of “becoming” (as Simone de Beauvoir points out) in existential terms. As women filmmakers position themselves within Hong Kong in a process of transformation from colony to SAR, their contribution to a film culture situated between the local and the global becomes more salient. Hong Kong women filmmakers are “made” not “born” in relation to what it means to be “female” in the hybrid, mutable, postcolonial, cosmopolitan space of Hong Kong.

As feminism shapes current discourses involving gender difference and sexuality, women filmmakers position themselves as political agents involved in the ideological work of transforming screen depictions of women. They engage with these issues within a specific location – a British former colony, a PRC possession, a semi-autonomous SAR, an ethnically, linguistically, and culturally Chinese city with a cosmopolitan flair, but also a multicultural meeting place of various races, ethnicities, and regional forms of Chinese identities and dialect groups, the quintessential “world city” where China “meets the West.” This is also the place where Chinese / Confucian attitudes toward women, the family, and sexuality rub up against not only Euro-American Christianity, but the legacy of Islam, Hinduism, and Zoroastrianism, brought in through ties to the British Empire and its colonies in South and Southeast Asia. Gender places women film artists on another edge – in the minority as female filmmakers but at the forefront as both within and outside the mainstream with a perspective on being from Hong Kong, on being Chinese, but also being on the border as a woman in the world.

Sensitive to questions of gender and sexuality, they have displayed a particularly acute understanding of the shifting nature of identity more generally as Hong Kong has changed sovereignty, the global economy has transformed class alignments and labor roles, and culture has become more global – multiethnic, multinational, and multilingual. They are cognizant of working in an environment characterized by temporal dislocations – “post” modern, “post” Fordist, “post” feminist, “post” hand-over, “post” colonial – and they approach their subject matter with that in mind. While some filmmakers may be exhausted by working in the aftermath of all these supposedly “terminal” moments, Hong Kong women seem to rise from the ashes

with insistent visions, novel techniques, and enormous creative energy. They have been leaders in the innovative use of the medium to explore subjectivity, memory, narrative form, character psychology, and domestic space, and their films highlight connections between the personal, the political, and the aesthetic.

HKSAR women filmmakers tend to be attracted to specific subjects and aesthetic forms; notably, women's roles in the Chinese family, working women, women's position in public life and politics, domestic violence, female sex workers, consumerism, lesbianism, romance, and female desire. Several filmmakers, including documentary filmmaker Tammy Cheung, have honed in on local expressions of gender relations that have been changing globally, including the phenomenon of the so-called "leftover" woman, who cannot find a life partner. She describes her production plans on this topic as follows:

Right now I'm making a film about love, relationships and gender issues – why we have this so-called problem that a lot of women cannot find a partner. It's very difficult because a lot of guys in Hong Kong are not up to standard. This is not my own observation. I've interviewed over 50 people now and most of them, including men, said the same thing: Hong Kong men are very weak, feeble, lost – they don't know what they're doing. I guess they're going through this transitional period because women are getting stronger, so they feel that they are losing their ground. But they don't want to admit it (Mirandilla 2012).

Women filmmakers have also been very sensitive to women outside of Hong Kong, and many have chosen to look at women in the PRC or within the Chinese diaspora as well. In addition, they have been quite adventurous in their use of film form – adopting and transforming observational / direct cinema techniques, counter-cinema, and complex "puzzle" narratives. Taking up perspectives often marginalized within the local commercial industry, Hong Kong women filmmakers have been inclined to explore aspects of film language that go beyond the "male gaze."

This chapter focuses on three films by director Ann Hui: *The Way We Are* (Ann Hui, 2008), *Night and Fog* (Ann Hui, 2009), and *All About Love* (Ann Hui, 2010) as case studies to explore the role women filmmakers have played in shaping the agenda for the depiction of HKSAR women on screen. Ann Hui is, arguably, the most lauded and prolific of Hong Kong's women filmmakers. Born in Manchuria, northeast China to a Japanese mother and Chinese father, she grew up in Macau and Hong Kong, majored in English and Comparative Literature at the University of Hong Kong and did further film studies in England. Her films have been screened around the world, including out of competition at Cannes. Hui won the best director award for *The Way We Are* at the 28th Hong Kong Film Awards (2009), and *A Simple Life* (Ann Hui, 2011) won the Volpi Cup for best actress (Deanie Ip), among other accolades, at Venice. Patricia Erens (2000), Tony Williams (1998), Elaine Ho (2001), Chua Siew Keng (1998), Hamid Naficy (2001), and Mirana Szeto (2011), among many others, have written on Hui's semi-autobiographical *Song of*

the Exile (Ann Hui, 1990) and Audrey Yue (2010) has made the film the subject of a book-length treatment published by Hong Kong University Press.

Other filmmakers, such as Tsai Ming-liang, acknowledge her international status as well. In his film, *The River* (Tsai Ming-liang, 1997), Hui has a cameo as a woman director in a key scene in which the protagonist Xiao Kang (Lee Kang-sheng) agrees to act as a corpse floating in a polluted Taipei river. As Tsai's film shows, in fiction and fact, Hong Kong women filmmakers such as Ann Hui take charge on screen and off, and they are clearly a New Wave force that other rebel filmmakers (Tsai included) notice and duly note on screen. Hui has a meaning and performs a role, then, that transcends her films, and this aspect of Hong Kong women's presence on global screens needs to be recognized and better understood.

Although Hui does not see herself as an auteur, it is important to look at these films as the expression of a singular vision in order to get a fuller picture of how she sees the world. Hui tends to see her style as mutable, enabling her to accommodate different genres and modes of production more easily, without the distinctive vision associated with directors such as Wong Kar-wai. However, Mirana Szeto sees this reluctance as Hui's resistance to a masculine notion of the auteur; Szeto asserts, "Unlike the imposing egoism of the auteur, her style is responsive and tender." (M.M. Szeto 2011: 53)

In fact, Hui's work is emblematic of the types of motion pictures made by other HKSAR female filmmakers – many of whom are not granted the distinction of being auteurs – perhaps because of a similar lack of blustering egotism on the world stage. In fact, the relationship between style and gender is quite complicated. There has been considerable debate in literary and cultural studies about female authorship, gendered vision, and feminine writing, and it remains moot whether there is any distinguishing characteristic of women's art. However, looking at directors such as Ann Hui as auteurs remains important, even in an age when cultural theorists such as Roland Barthes have announced the "death of the author." Burying the notion may be premature for women, since they have not been regarded as capable of being film auteurs until quite recently.

Women operate as a visible minority within the industry. They tend to be more self-conscious about their choice of subject matter and approach because they have been marginalized – and may be seen by some as the representative or "token" voice of women in film circles. Like women who have emerged in traditionally male-dominated professions in the past, they serve as more than just another pair of hands in the production of a film. They gravitate toward or are hired to deal with particular themes, characters, or plotlines. Filmmakers work with material they know, and women directors intimately "know" the challenges women face in public and private life. Hong Kong women directors, not surprisingly, have made an enormous contribution to those aspects of film culture that deal with gender, sexuality, the family, and questions of changing identities. Auteur theory claims that films should be interpreted as extensions of their

creators, and Hong Kong women filmmakers do, indeed, seem to put their lives, concerns, and vision on the screen.

It is possible to take the gender (female) and location (Hong Kong) of these filmmakers as a starting point without making claims for any essential sexual, ethnic, or national identity that can be teased out of any specific film. Rather, the lived, gendered, embodied experiences of these filmmakers appear to be linked to what can be perceived on screen. This chapter explores the issues, perspectives, and aesthetic concerns of Ann Hui's films in relation to the wider context of feminist theory and global film practices. While male filmmakers also deal with women's lives, Ann Hui's films highlight Hong Kong women in ways that other screen representations neglect. These films take up issues common in Hong Kong film culture – including domestic violence, family life, and romantic coupling. However, they do so from a different angle, with attention to considerations downplayed by other filmmakers.

Ann Hui has, on many occasions, resisted several labels attached to her career as a filmmaker – New Wave, auteur, and feminist. For example, in one interview, she discusses her perspective on “feminism” as follows:

The reason that I so often tell women's stories in my movies is because I find it very easy to put myself in their shoes. For me, my identity as a woman does not mean feminism, but a way of thinking and a perspective of looking at the world. I cannot avoid that (Pang 2010).

Although she does not see her films as exhibiting any “style” characteristic of auteurs in world cinema, she dislikes the label “New Wave” because it somehow erases her distinctiveness:

I was initially resistant to the idea of the “Hong Kong New Wave.” I didn't like it very much. I mean filmmakers should be individuals... At the time I didn't like it because I thought the particular grouping erased my individuality. (Cheung, Marchetti and Tan 2011: 53)

However, these have been the frames (authorship, feminism, and the New Wave) used by most scholars approaching her oeuvre, and, arguably, they are quite productive.

Taking Hui as an auteur, for instance, allows for the serious consideration of *The Way We Are*, *Night and Fog*, and *All About Love* as evidence of her thinking about women's lives in Hong Kong at a particular moment in time. Common thematic preoccupations surface that also resonate with her previous films, including women's changing roles within the family, the community, and the workforce; aging; May–December romances; class divisions; motherhood; and, political activism. As a New Wave filmmaker, Hui frames her material with reference to the international New Wave (e.g., episodic narratives, temporal dislocation, direct address to

the camera, foregrounding of film style and techniques, citations from other films, dialectical treatment of ideas) as well as Hong Kong's New Wave (e.g., topical issues, vernacular speech, televisual aesthetics, commitment to exploring a specifically Hong Kong identity, interest in social realism, etc.). Hector Rodriguez sees this as: "the way that cinematic representation can keep faith with distinctly Chinese aesthetic traditions within a modernist framework influenced by international art cinema themes" (Rodriguez 2001: 58).

Hui's work overwhelmingly focuses on women; however, the same could certainly be said of many directors whose work would not be classified as feminist. However, in the case of Hui, a partisan, political voice of advocacy for women's rights does emerge, albeit often to be undercut within a dialogic mix of competing perspectives and narrative twists. A feminist (or, perhaps, postfeminist) vision emerges out of the struggle – an uneasy truce with competing perspectives about women's lives.

However, the question remains as to the best way to approach Hui's perspective on women. The emergence of "cosmofeminism," the merging of feminism with current philosophical reappraisals of "cosmopolitanism" as an antidote to neoliberal globalization and reactionary fundamentalism in a post-9/11 world, provides one possible method. In recent appeals to cosmopolitanism as an ethical or political strategy, the "women's question," as Kwame Anthony Appiah (2006) terms it, often comes up as a way of highlighting the importance of countering the anti-female aspects of many of the Christian, Hindu, and Muslim fundamentalist doctrines now circulating the globe. In her essay provocatively entitled, "A Wandering Paradigm, or Is Cosmopolitanism Good for Women?," Ksenija Vidmar-Horvat (2013) looks specifically at the contributions of women theorists such as Julia Kristeva, Niamh Reilly, Amy Pason, and Seyla Benhabib to answering this thorny question. Judith Butler's entry into the conversation with her post-9/11 book, *Precarious Life: Powers of Violence and Mourning* (2004), makes the case for cosmopolitan care against xenophobic belligerence. Given that nations are often associated with male violence, patriarchal privileges, and patriotic brotherhoods built on the backs of subordinated women, the appeal to "universal" rights transcending the sexism of a male-dominated bellicose state speaks persuasively to feminists. Global sisterhood is powerful, and the idea of cosmopolitan feminism as a way to put this perceived solidarity into action has its appeal.

However, the perils of uncritically adopting "humanism," "cosmopolitanism," and many other universal philosophical positions cannot be swept aside so easily. Writing on the intersections between feminism and cosmopolitanism, Diana Elena Neaga has pointed out the underlying danger that:

involves the great risk of imperialism and ethnocentrism, namely that of claiming that all, or at least part of "our" values are or should be shared by the "others," the problem getting even more complicated once we try to find out what these values are (Neaga 2011: 324).

The conundrum highlights the ways in which gender, racial, ethnic, national, religious, and other differences contribute to the cosmopolitan mix unequally so that a level common ground for exchange (political as well as commercial, social, cultural, and aesthetic) may be difficult to establish. This is why the postmodern critique of “grand narratives” is so powerful, since the stories we tell ourselves about oppression, liberation, equality, and cosmopolitan fraternity obscure the violence needed to achieve these utopian dreams. Ackbar Abbas eloquently lays out the relationship between cosmopolitanism and power as follows:

The relationship of cosmopolitanism to power suggests that it cannot be thought of simply as an honorific or universalist term, connoting either an ability to transcend narrow loyalties and ethnocentric prejudices or a sympathetic disposition to ‘the other.’ ... what about ... a situation where ‘divergent cultural experiences’ are not freely chosen but forced on us, as they are under colonialism? What form of ‘openness’ should we cultivate then, and would this constitute a cosmopolitan stance or a compradorist one? Could cosmopolitanism be one version of ‘cultural imperialism’?... These questions need to be asked, but to answer them by equating cosmopolitanism with cultural imperialism is ultimately as simplistic as it is to see it in purely celebratory terms (Abbas 2002: 210–211).

This is to not say that cosmopolitan dreams are not worth having – but with many major caveats in mind as Abbas duly warns. The editors (Carol A. Breckenridge, Homi K. Bhabha, Sheldon Pollock, and Dipesh Chakrabarty) of a special issue of the journal *Public Culture* devoted to “cosmopolitanism” make a similar point:

The cosmopolitanism of our times does not spring from the capitalized “virtues” of Rationality, Universality, and Progress; nor is it embodied in the myth of the nation writ large in the figure of the citizen of the world. Cosmopolitans today are often the victims of modernity failed by capitalism’s upward mobility, and bereft of those comforts and customs of national belonging. Refugees, peoples of the diaspora, and migrants and exiles represent the spirit of the cosmopolitical community (Breckenridge et al. 2000: 6).

I would argue it is well worthwhile for the oppressed to struggle against class, race, colonial, and other forms of injustice not simply as individuals but as collectives and not only in local circumstances but as transnational political bodies. Martha Nussbaum (2010), Kwame Anthony Appiah (2006), among others, have written persuasively on the ways in which multiple identities operate within the context of a cosmopolitan sense of a common humanity, and Aihwa Ong’s (1999) notion of the “flexible citizen” may point to the need for cosmopolitanism as a way of addressing new economic and geopolitical realities. This is where a renewed interest in the cosmopolitan fits. However, the racial and class aspects of cosmopolitanism rest on the inequalities of the international marketplace and the geopolitics on which those economic relationships lie.

The world market gives rise to cosmopolitan culture, and Marx and Engels note this very clearly in *The Communist Manifesto*:

The bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country... And as in material, so also in intellectual production. The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property. National one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures, there arises a world literature (Marx and Engels 1848).

It may be difficult to find a better description of how capitalism functions on the world stage today. Globalization has intensified the process, neoliberal policies making national borders and protectionist measures redundant. Pheng Cheah (1998) points out in his writings on the cosmopolitical that Marx and Engels envision a proletarian cosmopolitanism “from below,” so to speak, in response to capitalist imperialism; however, the twenty-first-century political response to this state of affairs varies widely. Some critics of globalization advocate a strengthened nation-state fueled by democratic controls on transnational corporations. Others, notably Ulrich Beck in the “Cosmopolitan Manifesto” (1998) and Jürgen Habermas (2001) in his work on the “post-national,” call for the United Nations, NGOs, and other entities outside the nation-state to offset the power of global capital and the risks faced by world events such as total war and climate change.

James Clifford in “Traveling Cultures” (1997: 17–46) has accentuated the cultural aspect of cosmopolitanism in its hybrid, deracinated, de-territorialized, nomadic dimension, but Marx and Engels (1848) seem to have put their finger on the way in which global capital has created a particular type of “world culture.” If we substitute “world cinema” for “world literature,” *The Communist Manifesto* describes not only how Hollywood dominates world screens, but also how international film festivals, art house exhibition circuits, DVD distribution networks, and digital video streaming create what we call “world cinema.” Like “world literature,” “world cinema” gestures toward an elite audience, even though, the truth is that Hollywood, Hong Kong martial arts films, and Bollywood productions are just as worthy as the cosmopolitan art house film. Kin-Yan Szeto (2011) takes this point up in her book on the cosmopolitics of martial arts cinema of the Chinese diaspora. Looking at Ang Lee, John Woo, and Jackie Chan, among others, she observes:

Colonialism, Chinese nationalism, and Western Orientalism and imperialism – along with their associated patriarchal discourses – shaped these film artists’ complex identities. The film artists have not been passive observers or victims of these forces but instead have deployed cosmopolitical consciousness tactically in navigating through them, with an inventive resilience that has enabled them not only to survive but also to succeed commercially. All these film artists’ perspectives inevitably collide and collude with hegemonic forces such as patriarchy and masculinist ideology (K.Y. Szeto 2011: 7).

If we look carefully at these ideological contradictions and continue with the dialectical reasoning implied, the global marketplace creates cosmopolitan culture, but, within that ideological formation, contradictions give rise to other political formations of negotiated resistance. As K. Y. Szeto (2011) notes, too, “patriarchy and masculinist ideology” take on a particular saliency in these complex, cross-border cultural configurations. This calls for a feminist response coming from women filmmakers.

Ann Hui’s career illustrates this cosmopolitical tendency quite well from a women’s perspective. As well as being a citizen of the world, Hui is also a Hong Kong woman, marginalized in world cinema by her gender, postcolonial status, Asian race, and Chinese ethnicity. Cosmopolitanism offers the possibility to join the company of world filmmakers, contribute to global cinema culture, and compete in prestigious international festivals; however, Hong Kong, China, and a female body mark very specific differences that may or may not “count” in the cosmopolitan reckoning. Despite what many scholars and even Hui herself claims, I argue that her cosmopolitanism has led her to interrogate the pros and cons of world citizenship for postcolonial women repeatedly throughout her filmmaking career in an expressly feminist manner. Humanist sympathy for all people vies in her oeuvre with very partisan sentiments, with community affiliations and identities complicating supposedly “universal” values and global citizenship. Some of Hui’s darkest visions, in fact, represent the failure of cosmopolitan promises involving human dignity, the rule of law, equality, and universal rights for women.

Films in which Hui depicts political activism bring these issues to the forefront, since they involve images of people organizing, addressing local issues, but on a transnational stage. Growing out of local interest in the stories of Vietnamese refugees who found themselves in camps in Hong Kong, her celebrated early film *Boat People* (Ann Hui, 1981), for instance, focuses on a Japanese photojournalist in post-1975 Vietnam as he becomes cognizant of the plight of the people set adrift in the aftermath of the war. In *Starry Is The Night* (Ann Hui, 1988), student activists at the University of Hong Kong take to the streets, and in *Ordinary Heroes* (Ann Hui, 1999), the female protagonist Sow (Rachel Lee) becomes an activist to improve the lives of people who live on fishing boats in typhoon shelters, like herself, constantly threatened with deportation because of their floating domiciles. Sow’s story is juxtaposed with a Brechtian street theater performance by Augustine Mok about the life of the radical journalist Ng Chung-yin (pinyin: Wu Zhongxian), who was a leader of Hong Kong Trotskyites in the 1970s and 1980s. The film alludes to other radicals directly or through fictional avatars, including Father Francis Mella, Lau San-ching, and “Long Hair” Leung Kwok-hung. When these activists appear on screen, the “whole world is watching” (as it was during the anti-war demonstrations outside the Democratic Convention in Chicago in 1968), and the notion that the world judges laws, policies, and attitudes beyond borders speaks to the political aspect of cosmopolitanism. As Vivian Lee (2009) points out, however, the gendered nature of Hong Kong politics cannot be forgotten (even

though the protagonist's amnesia makes remembering excruciatingly difficult) and Sow's abuse at the hands of a local politician makes this clear: "Sow is a victim of both sexual and social violence, but she is also the agent through whom the repressed truths of the past are recalled" (V. Lee 2009: 280).

What Ann Hui does in her depictions of Hong Kong political activism, then, is to put women into the mix. Few would accuse her of being "politically correct," and she does not shy away from challenging portrayals of deeply flawed and often very disturbing characters as well as scenes that graphically illustrate her uneasiness with leftwing politics and Communism from the re-education camps in Vietnam to the excesses of the Cultural Revolution in China. She sums up her deep suspicion as well as fascination with political processes in an interview in which she says: "Actually, I don't know much about politics, and I don't care for it either" (Cheung, Marchetti and Tan 2011: 70).

These films depict women publicly agitating for their rights in the cosmopolitan context of Hong Kong. How well Hong Kong accommodates women becomes the question, and whether these women face a local or global injustice comes into play. Given Hong Kong's unique position as a "Special Administrative Region" of China, and, thus, at the edges of the nation-state, technically beyond the dictates of the Chinese Communist Party, and no longer under the control of British colonial authorities, it provides the perfect venue to consider the human within a world context without the direct control of the nation-state. How universal are these stories about Hong Kong's women? Should the plight of these characters interest cosmopolitan audiences outside of Hong Kong or not? The world has a right to watch, but do any outside entities have a right to judge or intervene? What does being "cosmopolitan" mean for Ann Hui when she tackles women's issues in her films? Does she employ a feminist perspective or not in her work?

Focusing on *The Way We Are*, *Night and Fog*, and *All About Love* through the converging lenses of the New Wave, auteur theory, and feminism allows these admittedly dissimilar films to speak to the same issues, highlighting contradictions in their depiction of women, and underscoring the dialectical play involved in the process. *The Way We Are* and *Night and Fog* clearly operate as a diptych, offering diametrically opposed visions of Tin Shui Wai, a poor, working-class, public housing satellite community in Hong Kong's New Territories. The Chinese titles of the films confirm the fact that, like Hui's earlier *Summer Snow* (Ann Hui, 1995) and *July Rhapsody* (Ann Hui, 2002) (with paired Chinese titles, *Woman at 40* and *Man at 40*), these two films (*Day and Night in Tin Shui Wai* and *Night and Fog in Tin Shui Wai*) should be taken as complementary. Both were shot by the same cinematographer, Charlie Lam, to give a similar "look" to the location. (Lam also shot *All About Love*. Wong Jing, known for his exploitation films and B-movie sensibility, produced them.) *The Postmodern Life of My Aunt* (Ann Hui, 2006)² and *A Simple Life* bookend these three films, and these two films appear to resonate more with each other as portraits of women entering old age – the former dealing with aging in the People's Republic and the latter set in Hong Kong – and less with the three considered here.

Dubbed the “City of Sadness” by the local press, Tin Shui Wai is physically isolated, with a high rate of unemployment and domestic abuse. The murder-suicide of a family of four depicted in *Night and Fog* is only one of the many cases of domestic violence, murder, and suicide in the district in recent years. While many critics and scholars take *The Way We Are* as a “humanist” slice-of-life within a realist tradition (e.g., Zarrow 2010), its depiction of functioning secondary schools and hospitals, churchgoing youth, employed women, and a tightly knit community belies the genuine suffering experienced by people in this depressed community. *Night and Fog* has been compared unfavorably to films such as Ken Loach’s *Ladybird Ladybird* (1994), also based on a “true story” of a woman mistreated by the selfsame social services designed to protect her from male violence. Critics point to its sensationalism and melodramatic treatment of wife battering, cross-border marriages, and social malaise. However, this meticulously researched film closely follows the “true story” of Lee Pak-sum, a man from Tin Heng Estate in Tin Shui Wai, who killed his six-year-old twin daughters, Lee Yin-li and Lee Tsz-wan, and his wife, Kam Shuk-ying, before stabbing himself to death. While *Night and Fog*, which is based on the truth, rings false on screen for some viewers, *The Way We Are*, a fairy-tale of domestic tranquility and community cohesiveness appears to be “real,” “authentic,” and “true.”

All About Love, a romantic comedy, diverges even further from the Tin Shui Wai films. Set in the more affluent Mid-Levels in Central Hong Kong, this queer comedy revolves around the lives of two professional women, who find themselves unexpectedly pregnant, and rekindle the lesbian love affair of their youth. Dealing with a very different class of women outside the heterosexual norm, *All About Love* seems to have next to nothing in common with either *The Way We Are* or *Night and Fog*. However, Hui, while noting the importance of class difference, acknowledges similarities as well:

This is similar because it’s also about [a] contemporary subject. People’s interactions in life nowadays, but it’s different because it deals with [a] different class. Usually I deal with the working class, poorer people. This time it’s with [the] middle class. People who work in offices as lawyers. It was quite different (Frances 2010).

On closer scrutiny, it becomes clear that all three films have more than female-centered plots in common. Topics such as the work-family balance, the place of state institutions in women’s lives, domestic vs. public roles for women, and the significance of feminist activism for women in Hong Kong today run throughout the films. Each topic receives varying amounts of attention, often from radically different angles, as Hui frames each through very distinct generic lenses. However, more than this, Hui manages to present these various aspects of Hong Kong women’s lives from radically opposed positions, so that a dialectical tug-of-war emerges that opens up the issue of the relevance of feminism to contemporary Hong Kong women. The use of Hui’s characteristic flashbacks in each film

indicates these different generic approaches. *The Way We Are* offers oral reminiscences illustrated by archival stills to give a sense of communal history to the story. *Night and Fog* splinters the perspective on the events depicted, refusing to provide a unified, communal vision in answer to the question of domestic violence. *All About Love*, however, uses animation to underscore the romance shared by the two women in the film.

The Way We Are

All three films deal with the changing dynamics of family life in Hong Kong and the breakdown as well as the stubborn endurance of Confucian values and patriarchal, heterosexual norms. Even under the ostensibly tranquil domesticity of *The Way We Are*, a passive-aggressive anger brews. The film begins with Ozu-like “empty” shots of a close-up of a butterfly, a second close-up of a crab, a much wider shot of the wetlands that surround the Tin Shui Wai estates, built on reclaimed land from the swamps and rice paddies, and a final shot in the sequence on the Sky Bridge as the camera moves from a shot of the empty horizon to show the buildings, streets, and light-rail train that make up the development. Images of bridges as liminal / transitional spaces figure prominently in Hui’s oeuvre, so this shot acts as a signature linking this film to the rest of her work. The film, in fact, deviates dramatically from Ozu’s tales of the bittersweet changes in Japanese families facing modern urban life. While Hui also chronicles those changes in *The Way We Are*, the transcendental acceptance of change and fate is replaced by a sharper look at women’s lives and gendered support networks.

Kwai (Paw Hee-ching), a widow raising a teenage son, On (Leung Chun-lung), on her own, lives in the same building with an older woman known only as “Ah Po” (Granny – Chan Lai-wun) a newcomer who finds employment in the same supermarket where Kwai works. They share more, however, than the same working-class job stocking the shelves at the neighborhood supermarket, managed by a much younger male boss. Both women are estranged from their families that have moved up in the world and left them lagging behind.

When Kwai’s mother, for example, falls ill and ends up in the hospital, Kwai avoids visiting her. At an earlier scene celebrating the matriarch’s birthday, Kwai holds back, out of place in a room with her siblings and their families planning to send daughters to study abroad and bringing their kids to Hong Kong periodically from the US for holiday visits. A series of still photographs of women working in Hong Kong’s textile factories and sweatshops (see Figure 10.1) serves as a flashback. Kwai’s mother reveals, in voice-over, that Kwai, sacrificing her own chance at an education, worked to send her brothers through school and continued to send money to her natal family even after marriage. The flashback allows for a different reading to emerge retrospectively of Kwai’s apparently cold treatment of her



Figure 10.1 Still flashbacks showing women working in Hong Kong's textile factories and sweatshops. (*The Way We Are*, dir. Ann Hui, 2008).

brothers and hospitalized mother. As Ackbar Abbas notes about Hui's use of flashbacks: "The flashback technique shows us a past and a present that do not quite mesh, that seem initially to contradict one another, but it is these discrepancies that force a reevaluation of both memory and experience" (Abbas 1997: 38).

Now, impoverished, but still independent, Kwai prefers to continue working at menial jobs rather than depend on her brothers, and she seems to live in fear of being considered a nuisance to her family – even at the expense of appearing to be unfilial.

Kwai's neighbor, Granny, shares a similar fate. Having lost her husband and daughter, she clings to her relationship with her grandson as her last remaining blood relation. However, her former son-in-law prefers not to have her as part of the family he tries to establish with his second wife and new mother-in-law. Her attempt to solidify the bond with the family by bringing gifts of gold jewelry to them is rebuffed, and she turns to Kwai and On for comfort. The film illustrates the Chinese saying that "neighbors are closer than distant blood relatives" superbly, but it also takes a jab at the Confucian order. Kwai accompanies Granny to see her former son-in-law rather than spend her day off with her own mother in the hospital, and the two neglected women bond across generations as victims of the same male privilege. Kwai, who sacrificed her youth for her brothers' benefit, must not interfere in their Confucian obligations to their mother by reminding the family too often of her status as an impoverished widow, and Granny must quietly fade from the scene and abandon her rights to be involved in her grandson's life. They both know their marginal status within their families do not give them much room to maneuver, and they turn to each other, instead, for solace and understanding.

As a way of recovering traditional values, Kwai's son, On, serves as a pillar of Confucian virtue in the film and saves the story from wallowing in the bitterness of his mother's and their neighbor's lives. Although unemployed and in limbo waiting to hear about his exam results to see if he can continue in school, On does not stray far from the family as he helps his mother around the house (even mopping the floor), goes on errands to buy the newspaper and salted eggs, helps Granny next door carry a television into her flat and change a hard-to-reach light bulb, and visits his own grandmother in the hospital, feeding her picky taste for birds' nest congee. Even though he claims to be an atheist, his friends suspect him of being a Christian, since he refuses to gamble at the mahjong tables and he attends a Bible fellowship in the hopes of getting a glimpse of his favorite teacher Ms. Tsui (Idy Chan). Growing into his role as the "man of the family," he divides up the pomelo (a fruit traditionally eaten at the mid-autumn family celebrations) to indicate he has matured, since, earlier in the film, he needed his mother's help to open a durian (a smelly, but sweet tropical fruit treat). Like the durian, the family may smell a bit of the gutter, but they also have a very sweet side that the film highlights as the working-class heart of Hong Kong, with twenty-first-century images of public mid-autumn celebrations juxtaposed with black and white images of similar festivities from the mid-twentieth century.

Night and Fog

The portrait of cross-generational female solidarity, hope for the younger generation, and nostalgic tribute to the contributions of the working classes finds its opposite in *Night and Fog*. The community literally and figuratively comes together for mid-autumn in *The Way We Are*, while it is ironically torn apart for another holiday, Easter, which commemorates Christian redemption and restoration, in *Night and Fog*. While the days and nights of *The Way We Are* display the quotidian rituals and relations that hold the community together, *Night and Fog* uncovers the dark side of Tin Shui Wai.

The title of the film refers to Alain Resnais's 1955 documentary on Nazi concentration camps, which alludes to Hitler's Night and Fog Decree of 1941 in which he told the Gestapo to make the enemies of the Reich disappear into the "night and fog" without a trace rather than imprison them. Hui explains the reference as follows:

At the end, I'm not even sure why the husband decided to kill his wife. Many factors contribute to the misery of this person, but to actually kill a person? And the children too? It's unexplainable, just like the Nazi brutalities in [Resnais's] *Night and Fog*. Irrational violence is deeply entrenched at the bottom of human nature. There are aspects of humanity that are simply there, but remain immune to rationalisation (E. Lee 2009).

Through the film's title, Hui links Tin Shui Wai to concentration camps and violence against women to the Holocaust – a more devastating metaphor is difficult to imagine. The director graphically depicts the irrational rage exhibited by the murder in a lurid close-up, for example, in which Lee (Simon Yam) glares directly into the camera, confronting the viewer with his mad stare. He serves as an alien presence, a source of unfathomable sadism, remaining at a distance throughout the narrative as Hui's camera often dwarfs him in high angle shots that turn him into an ant living in the maze of the housing estate.³

While the murders may be attributed to the irrational violence of "human nature" as noted in this interview, Hui goes beyond the domestic and human psychology in the film to indict a sexist society as well. In fact, she moves between a humanist vision and what could be called a feminist analysis of society. While the motivations of the characters appear contradictory, the inadequacy of social institutions to deal with women's lives is quite clear. As the characters become more difficult to fathom through the conflicted accounts of the witnesses to the crime, the inadequacies and implicit sexism of the public system come to the surface.

Presented as a series of flashbacks narrated by various acquaintances of Lee Sum and his younger, second wife Wong Hiu-ling (Zhang Jingchu), the central characters do, indeed, vanish in the same way that Charles Foster Kane remains elusive in Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane* (1941). Cheuk Pak-tong links this technique to Hui's distinctive style: "narrative structures that evolve from multiple points of view to multiple layers of time and space intertwining with each other" (Cheuk 2008: 55).

The multiple perspectives obscure any singular perspective that may explain the events on screen.

Just as *Citizen Kane* begins with the camera trespassing on the enclosed estate, *Night and Fog* begins inside the prison-like, fenced-in, women's shelter, which serves as one of the principal locations in the narrative, and with a news report about the deaths in Tin Shui Wai. The women at the shelter become enraged when a policeman on television claims that no report of domestic violence had been filed involving the family. The shelter inmates scream and throw pillows at the screen. Hui positions the camera in place of the television, so that the furious women appear to be hurling their angry remarks and objects directly at the viewers. They insist on seeing the whole story, and the director attempts to satisfy that demand as the narrative unfolds.

Aspects of the story of Tin Shui Wai that vanished, so to speak, in *The Way We Are* surface, with a vengeance, in *Night and Fog*. The border, for example, physically defines Tin Shui Wai, and the film includes ample scenes set in Sichuan and in Shenzhen. The mainland remains an absent presence in *The Way We Are*, however. Kwai's brother turns up late to their mother's birthday party, complaining that he was delayed on a business trip to mainland China. On, in another scene, wears a tee-shirt with a crossed-out image of the hammer and sickle with the slogan, "The party's over." Other than these instances and a few remarks by Kwai's mother

about a relative from Taiwan's recent reunion with her daughter separated by the border for over twenty years, the People's Republic remains out of the picture.

As a satellite town very close to the PRC border, Tin Shui Wai has a relatively large proportion of newly arrived mainland residents – and, of course, Granny in *The Way We Are* may be a new arrival. No words or narrative points are needed, however, to establish the fact that the redefinition of Hong Kong's relationship to the mainland has had a huge impact on Kwai's life. The factory girls in the photos of her youth no longer exist in Hong Kong, since most of the manufacturing segment of the economy has moved to Guangdong province. Jobs have shifted to service and retail, so Kwai and Granny work in a supermarket in *The Way We Are*, and Ling serves as a waitress in a *cha chan teng* local diner in *Night and Fog*.

Food defines the characters, and the lovingly prepared mushrooms, fish congee, mooncakes, and shared fruits in *The Way We Are* turn into the hot pickled chili peppers of Sichuan on Ling's dining table in *Night and Fog*. The unemployed Lee fishes to supplement the family's meager food supply, and, in the penultimate scene of the film, his taking his twin daughters out fishing foreshadows their bloody end. Food, in fact, tends to set Lee off. His hot temper erupts when he is served pork and noodles rather than a pork chop at the *cha chan teng*, fried rather than steamed fish at home, and, finally, spilt rice sends him on a rampage. In a flashback to the couple's honeymoon in Sichuan, the refusal of Lee's mother-in-law to feed him lunch without his contributing money to the household budget also enrages Lee. He puts the family's pet dog into a sack and beats it to death. Later, when Lee murders his wife and daughters, cross-cutting weaves these two events together. Lee acts from the gut, and, in another scene, in order to intimidate his wife into returning to him, he seeks her out in Shenzhen, grabs a knife from a street vendor, and slashes open his abdomen. Later, this gesture of lifting his shirt to cut himself gives him away. Since a murderer is unlikely to lift a victim's shirt, the police determine the wound is self-inflicted, and Ling is exonerated posthumously of the multiple homicides her husband tried to pin on her with his dying breath.

Fleshing out the details of the news story, Hui gets at the root of the dismal conditions in which the couple live. Unemployed and alcoholic, Lee lives off social security for a construction injury that supposedly incapacitated him. Like many mainland brides,⁴ Ling had expected a very different sort of life across the border, away from her rural Chinese roots, in the big city of Hong Kong. The isolated satellite town of Tin Shui Wai, however, offers few prospects, since the factories have vacated the New Territories. When another immigrant from the mainland chats with Ling sitting on the curb in front of her building, fresh bruises on her face, the neighbor seems blind to the fact that Ling does not care about the space, clean air, proximity to the Wetlands Park, and other advantages of the housing flats. Between Sichuan poverty and Hong Kong marginality, Ling finds herself trapped.

Ann Hui attributes more than part of the blame for this to Hong Kong's treatment of mainland women, and *Night and Fog* systematically shows the human consequences of government policies governing cross-border marriages. Ling has



Figure 10.2 Ling begging an insensitive policeman to accompany her to confront her husband and retrieve her daughters, while he dismisses the case as just “a lovers’ quarrel.” (*Night and Fog*, dir. Ann Hui, 2009).

difficulty leaving her abusive husband because she cannot survive in Hong Kong without his social security payments and access to public housing. The public bureaucracy represented by the district councilor, social worker, police (see Figure 10.2), and women’s shelter frustrate Ling in her futile attempt to find a solution to her dilemma. In each case, the institutions visually box her in as Ann Hui uses the *mise-en-scène* to constrain Ling in cramped rooms, framed by windows, doorways, or enclosing shadows.

The scenes in rural Sichuan graphically show why Ling finds it difficult to return to the poverty of her natal family. At dinner, the electricity goes out, and a centipede attacks, highlighting the impoverished and primitive conditions in which the family lives. In another scene, Ling calls her mother for sympathy only to be told to go back to her husband who must be “good,” because he helped to build a new house for them, and, in any case, all the men in the village beat their wives as well. While the middle-class wife in *All About Love* is advised to divorce her abusive husband, Ling’s social worker makes every effort to keep the Lee family intact. In one scene, for example, Lee manipulates their naïve social worker into taking his pleas for a second chance with his wife seriously by dropping to his knees and sobbing. This performance dramatizes some of the typical behavior of abusers as they swing between murderous rages and gestures in which they manipulate their victims through disarming pity and beguiling charm in order to maintain their control over the relationship. The economic and immigration complications of the divorce push Ling back into the marriage as well, when her ploy to prove Lee has molested their daughters fails. Only “special circumstances,”

such as incest, would allow Ling to leave her husband, legally stay in Hong Kong, and receive welfare. The Hong Kong government considers her abuse “routine,” and she fails to qualify.

Ann Hui works with a few basic types in all three films with a flair for using characters defined by their gender, age, nationality, and function in the narrative in a fashion worthy of Bertolt Brecht’s epic theater. In *All About Love*, the figure of the young Hong Kong man who appears as the filial On in *The Way We Are* and Lee’s pimp son in *Night and Fog*, for example, has turned into Mike (William Chan), the teenage lover of Anita (Vivian Chow), as another face of youthful masculinity in the trilogy. Their May–December relationship flips Lee and Ling’s cross-border, cross-generational marriage on its head, by portraying sex between a woman nearing middle age and a much younger man rather than showing the lascivious older man on the prowl for young women in Shenzhen. It is as if On’s crush on his teacher Ms. Tsui (Idy Chan, a popular television actress, who adds a bit of glamour in the cameo) in *The Way We Are* has been requited. The murderous Lee finds his counterpart in the rather sympathetic wife-beater, Robert (Eddie Cheung), who struggles to find a way out of the cycle of abuse that defines his marriage, in *All About Love*. His bisexual lawyer, Macy (Sandra Ng), takes pity on him, despite the warnings of her lesbian friends not to get involved with a violent man. Macy diagnoses the problem as sexual dysfunction rather than sadism and sets out to “cure” Robert by giving him lessons in the female orgasm. *All About Love* offers hope that a dose of feminism can raise Robert’s consciousness and transform him into a sensitive spouse, and it provides a respite for director Hui, as well, from the violent misogyny of the previous film.

Marriage and the family (nuclear and extended) are only two of the institutions that shape women’s lives in these films. Economic relationships define them as well. All three films dramatize labor hierarchies in the marketplace, for example. They clearly depict the characters’ class standing as well as their roles as consumers in a society where human beings, too, can be bought and sold. Even in scenes in which romance offers respite from the economic grind, the financial bedrock behind all human relationships does not remain buried for long. *Night and Fog*, for example, includes some tender scenes between Lee and Ling (e.g., their courtship in Shenzhen, a glimpse of Lee washing Ling’s hair, Ling’s dance for joy in a rainstorm in Sichuan). However, the fact that their marriage has its basis in the financial fact of Hong Kong’s urban affluence and Sichuan’s rural underdevelopment keeps the hints at romance in perspective.

All About Love

Ling and her sister expressly go to Shenzhen to find men to support them; they have wealthy Hong Kong men in their sights. They hope for a work permit even if the marriage falls apart. Their situation finds its parallel in *All About Love*. In this

case, Macy helps a gay friend, Lucca [sic] (Rick Lau), get Hong Kong residency for his foreign boyfriend, Antonio (Robert Zen Humpage), by marrying him. At other points in the narrative, Macy's friends complain about their inability to adopt children as single women or as a lesbian couple; social workers only give them a slim hope of getting a disabled child. Affluent but homosexual, these characters have difficulty negotiating between the dictates of the state and its laws and their personal and conjugal happiness.

The economics of family life, however, that marginalize Kwai and Granny in *The Way We Are* and force Ling to remain in an abusive marriage in *Night and Fog* nearly vanish in the affluent world of *All About Love*. Food, again, speaks volumes, and the catered European dinner party, with an expensive bottle of Greek wine to boot, that the two main lesbian couples – Macy and Anita, Eleanor (Joey Man) and Wai (Jo Kuk) – enjoy on their roof places them far beyond the mushrooms, durians, chilies, and river fish of *The Way We Are* and *Night and Fog*.

However, both Macy and Anita still worry about money. Macy takes Robert's divorce case reluctantly, for instance, because she does not have enough cash on hand to pay the rent at her law office. Anita considers an abortion, out of fear of losing her job, because of harassment at her bank when the management discovers she is pregnant and unmarried. Although Mike clings to Anita, his youth – he is a college student with a series of menial, service jobs as bartender, stock boy, and sandwich chef – precludes him from supporting his child and its mother. Even a scene without any narrative motivation keeps the question of women's sexuality and money in play in the film. An unnamed European woman talks about a female acquaintance of fifty finding a "sugar daddy" on the internet to the bemused silence of her male Asian companion, and the Shenzhen "gold diggers" from *Night and Fog* find their upscale parallel in this anecdote.

Shifting the focus from looking at the Tin Shui Wai films in tandem, and taking *Night and Fog* and *All About Love* as a pair instead opens up some productive ways of understanding the depiction of women in all three films. The all-female space of the women's shelter in *Night and Fog* finds its parallel in the lesbian bar scene in *All About Love*. In both cases, women talk candidly about their most intimate thoughts and dreams in the company of other women. After chatting all night with her new friends in the women's shelter, Ling remarks that the evening made her the happiest she had been since arriving in Hong Kong.

The women's discussion brings up several issues on the agenda for feminists in Hong Kong. Ling's inability to reconcile staying in Hong Kong with the desire to leave her abusive husband illustrates the status of mainland wives who wish to divorce their husbands. The plights of the other women involved in the conversation, or there in absentia as objects of gossip, also give voice to a litany of problems facing Hong Kong women. For example, a woman in the shelter who has severe epileptic seizures complains about the system's inability to deal with women with multiple needs. The marginalization of the angry, pregnant Filipina woman in the shelter speaks to the problems faced by non-Chinese immigrants. Ultimately, the



Figure 10.3 Macy joining a conversation at a bar. Hui included well-known faces within the lesbian community in Hong Kong in the scene. (*All About Love*, dir. Ann Hui, 2010).

film indicts the police and social workers as unable to intervene effectively to assist victims of domestic violence (e.g., the police dump Ling in the shelter after hours with no social worker on duty to help with her case).

A parallel scene in *All About Love* brings up a different series of issues on the feminist agenda. Macy's conversation with fellow lesbians at the bar ranges from topics that include female sexual fluidity, gender self-definition, and patriarchal privilege (see Figure 10.3). Hui includes women known within the lesbian community in Hong Kong in the scene; namely, video artist Ellen Pau Hoi-lun (one of the founders of Videotage) and lesbian activist Connie Chan (one of the organizers of Hong Kong LGBT Pride Parade). The women have a frank discussion about their difficulty accepting bisexual women, whom they see as lacking in "commitment" on several levels – to their female partners, the lesbian-feminist political agenda, as well as their own identity as lesbians. Macy counters by calling the women hypocrites, since they petition for their own rights without tolerating the sexual orientation of others.

Whereas *Night and Fog* shows the women bonding during their conversation, *All About Love* uncovers the enormous gaps among feminists and the fractured politics of the women's community. The question of "commitment" operates on a number of levels. While Ling's "commitment" to her Hong Kong husband leads to her tragic demise in *Night and Fog*, Macy's reluctance to "commit" in *All About Love* delays her happiness. Eventually, in a very utopian turn, all the characters "commit," in one way or another, to raising Anita's and Macy's babies. Macy's commitment to Anita endures one more test at the film's conclusion, when she sees her aunt (a cameo by actress Fung Bo-bo) at a disco. Fearing being "outed" to her family, Macy tries to get Anita and the others to act more like "friends" rather than intimates. However, when

her aunt's lesbian escort turns up, Macy realizes that her "closet" has become antiquated, and she dances a celebration tango with her lover Anita to celebrate.

Taking up what Adrienne Rich (1986) has called the "lesbian continuum," *All About Love* illustrates that heterosexuality is no longer "compulsory" in Hong Kong cinema, and the film flows into what Helen Leung has identified as Hong Kong's "queerscape" (Leung 2008).⁵ The city, in fact, has been a leader in Asian queer cinema, serving as the host of the Hong Kong Lesbian and Gay Film Festival (HKLGFF), and the production base for many LGBTQ filmmakers, including Yau Ching, Stanley Kwan, Kit Hung, and Simon Chung, among others. However, as a reflection of the cosmopolitan nature of the queerscape, *All About Love* also takes up themes circulating globally involving queer families. The story of two lesbian mothers resonates, for example, with Hollywood romantic comedies such as *The Kids Are All Right* (Liza Cholodenko, 2010).⁶

All About Love, in fact, runs through a dizzying and nearly exhaustive list of queer and feminist issues, including gay marriage, LGBT immigration, interracial romance, sexual identity and its fluidity, adoption, abortion, single mothers, discrimination against pregnant women in the workforce, violence against women, the status of foreign domestic workers, May–December romances, changing notions of femininity and masculinity, the continuing impact of Confucianism, patriarchal hierarchies, female orgasms, and the closet. Putting queer issues aside, *Night and Fog* treats many of these same concerns as well.

In fact, both films build to climactic scenes that highlight another aspect of feminism seldom documented in commercial Hong Kong cinema; that is, women engaged in street demonstrations agitating for their rights. In *Night and Fog*, Lily (Law Wai-keung) and some other women from the shelter go to a demonstration to protect Victoria Harbor in support of a Legco (Legislative Council) member who had helped Lily file a petition for public housing, even though she did not yet have permanent resident status (see Figure 10.4). Their participation in the demonstration, however, also allows them to highlight their own concerns. The film cross-cuts between Lily at the demonstration and Ling begging an insensitive policeman to accompany her to confront her husband and retrieve her daughters. The officer refuses to get involved in a domestic dispute, and Lee slaughters Ling and their daughters while the others demonstrate for more help for women. The irony fuels Lily's anger, and a cut to her debriefing after the murder underscores the point that the police tried to cover up the fact that they refused to help when it was requested. They ignored the gravity of the situation, dismissing domestic assault and battery as a purely private concern.

A parallel scene in *All About Love* shows Eleanor, Macy, and others banding together to picket the bank where Anita works. Anita has been sequestered in a conference room and told to knit rather than do her job, since the bank does not consider an unwed mother fit to greet the public. The demonstration outside has a festive atmosphere. Lucca and some of Macy's other friends picnic with some Filipinas who have come out in support. As they share food, the bonds linking the



Figure 10.4 Rare sight in Hong Kong commercial cinema in which women are shown engaging in street demonstrations, fighting for their rights. (*Night and Fog*, dir. Ann Hui, 2009).

groups – across gender, class, and immigration status – seem to make up for the negative depiction of the bullying pregnant Filipina in the women’s shelter in *Night and Fog*. In the face of the state legal system and the economic power of the banks, women of various classes and men of differing sexual orientation have more in common than may be expected. An unanticipated solidarity emerges, and Anita, initially embarrassed by the street action, gets a very generous settlement in her case. Although she only wants an apology and the freedom to do her job in peace, the activism that bore little fruit in *Night and Fog* becomes a potent force for women’s rights in *All About Love*. Comedy has its utopian moments, and *All About Love* goes from consecrating the couple to celebrating the community.

Conclusion

A poster in Macy’s law office invites us to put the “is” back in “feminism,” and these three films by Ann Hui certainly do that. All three deal with the ways in which women have been mistreated by contemporary Hong Kong society. Most of the women in *Night and Fog* are victims of physical abuse; however, Ling and Lee’s single, female next-door neighbor, who witnesses the implosion of the family living in such close proximity to her, points to another common thread of the marginalized, isolated, and perpetually single “leftover” woman – unmarried, widowed, divorced, and lonely – who cannot find a partner. Hui’s choice to champion the lives of these women points to a feminist critique of a society that

cannot accept changes in gender roles easily. At a time when global feminism has been splintered by heteronormative arrogance, racism, and other forms of intolerance, Hui steps into the fray and puts all these concerns on the table. Disturbing, debatable, contradictory, and absolutely essential to public discourse, these hotly contested issues seldom find a voice in feature films in Hong Kong – or elsewhere – and Ann Hui has brought them to the screen in films that circulate beyond the borders of the HKSAR.

To return to the question posed by Ksenija Vidmar-Horvat (2013) about whether cosmopolitanism is “good” for feminism, it seems useful to conclude by asking whether cosmopolitanism has been good for Ann Hui as a Hong Kong woman filmmaker. In fact, Hui’s film *Song of the Exile* (a Hong Kong–Taiwan–Japan co-production) makes a very eloquent case for the cosmopolitan over the partisan and the patriotic. As Hueyin (Maggie Cheung), a young woman filmmaker, who doubles for the film’s director in many ways, reconciles her Japanese identity with her Chinese upbringing, her Japanese-born mother embraces the British colony of Hong Kong as home rather than following her other daughter to Canada, and the two worldly women settle in.

However, the film does not leave it at that. Hui provides another political vision in the aftermath of June 4, 1989, the time when the film was made, by using the era of the Cultural Revolution (1966–76), the period in which the film is set, as a parallel. Hueyin travels across the border to visit her beloved paternal grandparents who have repatriated to “help” China, but, instead, become victims of the Cultural Revolution. She visits China, but is not, in any way, tempted to stay. Her cosmopolitan meanderings tied to the multicultural nature of Hong Kong as a British colony and haven for ethnically and racially mixed families, cross-border ambitions, and, in this case, female agency, take her away from Maoism, Communism, and the Chinese nation-state. The character is too worldly to buy into leftwing partisan politics, too sharp to sympathize with the Red Guards, and too independent to be lured into the trap of patriotic or filial duty. Cosmopolitanism works for Hui as well as for her character Hueyin, and it allows them both to walk away from mainland China and advance into the world.

Bill Nichols (1994) points out in his analysis of international film festivals that certain types of films appeal to programmers around the world. Beyond identifiable art movie characteristics, these festival films tend to balance clear cultural markers (exotic placeholders, if you will) with universal (European / Western) humanism. They are, in other words, “cosmopolitan.” They perform domestic political situations as universal in order to be intelligible to the non-local viewer. Nichols puts it this way:

the political will be refracted not only by our own repertoire of theories, methods, assumptions, and values, but also by our limited knowledge of corresponding concepts in the other cultures to which we attend (Nichols 1994: 19).

The politics of these festival films – no matter what the issue or location – are the same; i.e., the universal longing for freedom of the oppressed as part of a shared humanity. Every viewer must understand the story, since it is the drama of the human condition. The most marginalized, maligned, insignificant character functions as Everyman in these films, and they, indeed, win awards at international festivals.

Many of Hui's films, including *Song of the Exile*, fit more or less into this category. Others, however, fit less easily within the parameters of this sort of humanism. Ironically, it is precisely because of Hui's cosmopolitanism that she is able to make both sorts of films – those lauded for their universality and those that address the local gender politics faced by women in the Hong Kong SAR. It is a cosmopolitan balancing act that gives her the opportunity to navigate the local and the global. Meaghan Morris, in another context, has termed this "cosmo-parochial" (2005). In this way, Hui speaks to women, specifically to Hong Kong women, as well as to the human condition that may open up fertile avenues for feminist conversations gesturing toward political change. However, the limitations of this cosmopolitanism must always be kept in mind, since the universal cannot contain the contradictions found in particular circumstances when being a woman, a Chinese woman, a Hong Kong woman, and/or an Asian woman may trump simply being human.

This is precisely the point made by the editors of *Public Culture* who call for a "cosmofeminism" as a way of approaching the cosmopolitan with greater theoretical and practical rigor:

Any cosmofeminism would have to create a critically engaged space that is not just a screen for globalization or an antidote to nationalism but is rather a focus on projects of the intimate sphere conceived as a part of the cosmopolitan... we would have the cosmofeminine as the sign of an argument for a situated universalism that invites other universalisms into a broader debate based on a recognition of their own situatedness (Breckenridge et al. 2000: 8–9).

This seems to give a postmodern edge to the cosmopolitan by offering the possibility of multiple cosmopolitanisms just as there are many different approaches to feminism as "situated universalisms." Following in the transnational footsteps of feminist scholars who have attempted to de-Westernize feminist studies, including Caren Kaplan, Inderpal Grewal, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Donna Haraway, Mayfair Yang, Rey Chow, Ella Shohat and Trinh T. Minh-ha, Seyla Benhabib (2006) calls for "another cosmopolitanism." A case has been made for cosmofeminism to join the ranks of the various definitions of cosmopolitanism that currently exist. It can take its place with the cosmopolitanism of the cultured elite (Kant), the aspiring border-crossing bourgeoisie or the proletariat at the service of transnational industry (Marx), the survival mode of the (post)colonial (the cosmopolitan as creole), and the equation of the cosmopolitan with globalized consumer capitalism.

However, I am not quite convinced that this diversity does justice to the concept, since cosmopolitanism, unlike many feminisms, is predicated on a universal notion of common humanity and unanimously agreed-upon cultural values. Feminism agitates against sexism and patriarchal privilege, but most feminists acknowledge that gender hierarchies do not take on any universal attributes. Male dominance may not look the same in Saudi Arabia and in China, for example, and require a range of theories, tactics, and practices to promote a feminist agenda. Feminist movements gain strength from a global sisterhood, but they are divided into “feminisms” by ethnic, racial, cultural, and religious plurality.

We share the planet, and we are all in this together, but finding the common ground to communicate and take action proves difficult. Etienne Balibar may sum it up best by saying this of cosmopolitanism:

What I have in mind is not a global citizenship or citizenship of the world, as if it could be considered a single constituency, but rather a citizenship in the world, or an increasing amount of civic rights and practices, in the world as it is, the complex system of spaces and movements that form the reality of what we call ‘the world,’ for which we are trying to invent a civilization (Balibar 2011: 224).

This seems precisely why Ann Hui, for example, is so drawn to images of local women in Hong Kong demanding their rights publicly in the city streets – whether they are battered mainland immigrants, Filipina domestic workers, or Hong Kong-born middle-class single mothers. Local institutions do not appear to be enough, and private corporations as well as public services such as schools, hospitals, the courts, and police do not adequately supply those basic rights. These stories about Hong Kong women operating within a cosmopolitan public sphere may provide one possible starting point for a serious consideration of the way characters, relationships, spaces, and histories can be imagined on screen and off by making them visible for audiences outside the HKSAR. World cinema, as it pictures the processes of globalization at work in our lives, demands a careful consideration of the contradictions that unite and divide us. Despite the limitations of the concept, cosmopolitanism may be the best place to begin, with Asia’s “world city” as an apt starting point.

Notes

- 1 The research for this chapter was made possible by the generous support of the Research Grants Council of Hong Kong for the project entitled “Hong Kong Women Filmmakers: Sex, Politics and Cinema Aesthetics, 1997–2010.”
- 2 For an analysis of *The Postmodern Life of My Aunt*, see Marchetti (2009).

- 3 Derek Lam discusses the character's "primitivism" and Hui's refusal to interpret his violence as a social issue in his doctoral dissertation: Lam (2013).
- 4 Mainland women often figure on Hong Kong screens. For more on these representations, see Shih (1998).
- 5 Borrowed from Gordon Brent Ingram.
- 6 I am grateful to Chuck Kleinhans for pointing this out in a panel devoted to *All About Love*, sponsored by the University of Hong Kong Women's Studies Research Centre Spring Workshop Series, March 13, 2012. I also wish to thank my fellow panelists, Julia Lesage, Denise Tse-Shang Tang, and Staci Ford for their insights.

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Love In The City

The Placing of Intimacy in Urban Romance Films

Helen Hok-sze Leung

Introduction: Romancing a Sunset Industry

“Our profession – it’s already a sunset industry.” So says the killer in the opening scene of *La Comédie Humaine* (Chan Hing-kai and Janet Chun, 2010). Affectionately dubbed by critics as “a love letter, in Cantonese, to Hong Kong cinema,” (Dengtu 2010: 59) the film deploys humor that requires from its audience a facility in Cantonese, and cinephilia at its most passionate. It tells the story of the unlikely friendship between a professional killer and a screenwriter through dexterous wordplay in Cantonese and insider jokes about films and the film industry. In its most celebrated sequence, the killer narrates his life story to his screenwriter friend using only the titles of (mostly Hong Kong) films. Although the film also contains physical humor and broad comedic moments, its reliance on both Cantonese and film knowledge positions local film buffs as its primary addressee, a gesture that has become increasingly rare as the majority of films made by Hong Kong filmmakers now aim for a pan-Chinese market. However, as the lament in the opening scene suggests, this return to the local seems to be an elegiac rather than a forward-looking endeavor.

The “sunset” discourse on the death of Hong Kong’s film industry is not a new one. As early as 1993, the year when *Jurassic Park* beat out local films to dominate the box office, the death knell of Hong Kong cinema had already begun to toll. It has simply become louder over the decades, and close to deafening in recent years. The number of productions and box office share have shrunk dramatically, from the over 200 per year during its heyday in the 1980s to the current 50 or so releases per year. More devastatingly, there is a steady exodus of established filmmakers

who opt to work in Beijing or Shanghai. Derek Yee, who established his creative workshop in Beijing in 2009 and was one of the last amongst his generation to do so, starkly predicted at the time of his move that “Hong Kong cinema, as we know it, will be dead in three years” (Maizi 2010: 85).

Local film critics share Yee’s pessimism. Even when they celebrated an upsurge in well-received and high-quality local productions that seemed to be breathing new life into the industry, even going so far as to regard these films as possibly a new “New Wave,” they wrote as though the phenomenon signified not a renewal but a last gasp of air before death. For example, in a beaming review of *La Comedie Humaine*, a critic argued that genre films like action movies and romance in Hong Kong cinema should be regarded as legitimate forms of local culture that are deserving of preservation. Yet, he also saw the current localist revival as nothing more than a swan song: “These Hong Kong filmmakers are desperately trying to document the end times for themselves: Ivy Ho’s *Crossing Hennessy*, Pang Ho-cheung’s *Love in a Puff*, Clement Cheung and Derek Kwok’s *Gallants*, Heiward Mak’s *Ex*, Barbara Wong’s *Breakup Club*... These films were not made without reasons” (Dengtu 2010: 60).

Admittedly, Hong Kong cinema during the last two decades has long struck critics and scholars as being in survival mode. Whether approached as “a cinema of disappearance” (Abbas 1997) or a “crisis cinema,” (Cheung and Chu 2004), there is a nagging sense that contemporary Hong Kong cinema is characterized by one form of *struggle* or another, be it with visuality, history, or self-identity. More intensely than ever before, it is now also struggling with its continued survival as a viable industry and a unique cinematic culture.

As I explore these questions, I am struck by the relevance of an unlikely film genre: the “urban romance” (*dushi aiqing xiaopin* 都市愛情小品) which, on the surface, seems to closely resemble the much maligned “rom-com” (romantic comedy) in Hollywood. In actuality, the two are entirely different beasts. Not only are urban romance films not always romantic or comedic, unlike the rom-com, they also tend to be rather restrained in expressions of sentimentality. Most of all, even though the Hollywood rom-com is predominantly urban, its sense of place is very weak. In other words, it matters little whether the lovers are sleepless in Seattle, trying to be friends with benefits in L.A., or going the distance between New York and San Francisco, the character of the specific urban setting is rendered virtually irrelevant by the formulaic narrative of the romance. By contrast, in many of the Hong Kong films, love is portrayed as a by-product of circumstances such as neighborhood dynamics, changes in city policies, or shifts in urban demographics. As I will discuss in the rest of this article, these films are not only telling stories about romantic love, they are at the same time detailing the nuance and complexity of a specific and ever-changing urban experience.

To explore these films as an affective form of urban documentation, my critical framework here relies on a body of “local theories.” I have used this strategy in various ways in my past work, where I made “conscious efforts to weave insights

from major theoretical works in English seamlessly into Hong Kong's local Chinese-language debates" which "advance sophisticated theoretical positions and are in explicit or implicit conversation with major formal academic works in the field" despite being published in non-academic venues (Leung 2008: 6). I have also argued for the theoretical character of local writings that do not legitimately "count" as theory within standard contexts of academic publishing (Leung 2007). While my previous efforts to marshal "local theories" have been queer endeavors, it strikes me that the fundamental spirit of the strategy goes deeper than my desire to acknowledge local debates on non-normative sexuality. In fact, the impulse is to be *critically* queer, i.e., to recognize non-normative forms of critical writings, on *any* subjects, that have the potential to transform the parameters that have excluded or marginalized them. In this article, even as I turn my attention to heterosexual romance, my analytical framework is guided by this critically "queer" impulse. It does not mean that I eschew scholarship "proper" or English-language debates outside of Hong Kong. Nor am I arguing for any essential authority or authenticity in local writings. It simply means that whenever possible, I choose to prioritize the critical insights of writers publishing in the local context: from the vast volume of writings on film in publications by the Hong Kong Film Critics Society and in the trade magazine *Hong Kong Film*, to the Chinese-language writings by Hong Kong-based intellectuals and artists as well as scholars who choose to publish some of their works outside of standard academic venues. In so doing, I hope to show that a critical framework that derives from locally published writings is just as relevant as one that draws primarily from the English-language works of internationally recognized theorists. There is also admittedly an affective aspect to this critical gesture: I, too, am writing a love letter of sorts to this local critical scene, as a tribute to its vibrant exchange of ideas and passionate concern over the city that, in the face of increased self-censorship and the creeping curtailing of press freedom, may also be in danger of disappearing.

Cinema and Urban Heritage

What is cinema's role in the constitution of a city's history, memory, and heritage? A recent case illustrates the complexity involved in asking such a question. In 2010, a battle was brewing between heritage activists and the Urban Renewal Authority in Hong Kong over the planned demolition of Wing Lee Street, a neighborhood in Sheung Wan with an intact block of tenement buildings that were built in the 1950s. The street was one of the targets in a redevelopment project to convert the neighborhood into a high-rise condo complex. Despite passionate protests by heritage activists, the city planners had not budged. Meanwhile, *Echoes of the Rainbow* (Alex Law, 2010), a modest production about a young boy's experience in the 1960s that was set in the Wing Lee Street neighborhood and filmed on location

there, won the Crystal Bear Award for Best Film at the prestigious Berlinale. When news of the success of *Echoes of the Rainbow* hit home, Wing Lee Street suddenly attracted the attention of the general public. In the weeks to come, crowds armed with cameras would pour into the street, taking pictures and leaving messages on the placards placed there by protesting activists. Soon, even foreign tourists joined in, some coming to Hong Kong with the express purpose of visiting the famed street. This was the kind of publicity activists could never dream of creating. Finally, the Urban Renewal Authority announced that it had revised its plans and that Wing Lee Street had been taken out of the redevelopment zone.

There are some complex lessons to be drawn from the unexpected influence *Echoes of the Rainbow* had on the city's redevelopment strategy. What is the relation between urban development, cinema, and heritage activism? Is the "saving" of Wing Lee Street a victory for the latter or an amplification of the contradictions amongst the three? I want to consider the question through a little known, but curiously ironic, detail about *Echoes of the Rainbow*'s success in Berlin. The film was screened at Filmtheater am Friedrichschain, an art-house cinema in a quiet residential district on the edge of Prenzlauerberg in East Berlin. The theater was almost torn down in 1991, when private investors wanted to build an office and apartment complex in its location. Saved by protests from local residents, the theater was later bought and renovated by filmmaker Michael Verhoeven, who made sure that the building preserved much of its original character (Berlinale). Moreover, the preservation of the site was accompanied by efforts to make direct impact on the day-to-day culture of the neighborhood. For instance, the use of the theater to screen Berlinale's youth-adjudicated Generation Kplus program was designed to appeal to local young viewers, with specific provisions made for them such as early screen times and live simultaneous translation into German during screenings. The fact that a film like *Echoes of the Rainbow*, set in a time and place so far removed from that of the neighborhood's inhabitants, managed to garner enthusiastic local reception attests to the venue's role in creating a vital cosmopolitanism in a quiet corner of East Berlin.

By contrast, the eleventh-hour capitulation to preserve Wing Lee Street was a calculated response to manufactured nostalgia that did not include an integrated vision for the *future* of the neighborhood. Taiwanese writer Lung Ying-tai, whose sojourn in Hong Kong during 2003–2012 has produced some of the sharpest insights on the disconnection between the city's cultural and urban policies, tells this story:

I walked past a primary school and saw these drawings ... The children drew colorful dragons, the Great Wall, the eternal Yangtze River, the beautiful Forbidden City. Clearly, this is part of their "civic education." In these drawings, you cannot see the crowded market in Wan Chai, the layered and winding old streets of Sheung Wan, the fishing villages in Tai Po, or the beautiful Sunset of Sha Wan King. Why is it that in Hong Kong children's imagination and celebration, the one thing I do not see is the city of Hong Kong? (Lung 2008: 104).

This observation succinctly captures the spirit of Lung's sustained critique of Hong Kong's redevelopment strategies in many of her other writings, most famously her widely-circulated essay on the controversial development project of the West Kowloon Cultural District (Lung 2008: 19–39). For Lung, urban development must go hand in hand with cultural policies that nurture people's connection with their neighborhoods. Without such nurturing, even little children begin to lose their connection to the city. Their sense of belonging is severed from their lived experience and instead abstracted into formulaic symbols of "the nation." The Urban Renewal Authority's decision to "save" Wing Lee Street only when it has become a consumer product of nostalgia illustrates precisely why this kind of "preservation" is incapable of achieving the goal Lung advocates. As Mathias Woo points out in his searing critique of Hong Kong's urban redevelopment policies, what gets preserved even after hard-fought battles is only the "hardware" (such as the old buildings themselves), whereas the "software" (the nurturing of "cultural infrastructure" and "community spirit") is all but ignored (Woo 2006: 69–73).

If cinema simply serves to commodify nostalgia, albeit with dramatic results in this case, its significance would be limited, if not questionable. In an essay from *The Hong Kong I Love*, lyricist Lin Xi shows how cinematic nostalgia and heritage activism can even become disconnected from the lived experience of urban dwellers. Lin describes how, during his university days, he would saunter through the Western District late at night, admiring the old buildings from the 1950s and 1960s. He was drawn to the wooden window panels and brass door handles that open into spacious balconies, features so reminiscent of the settings in Eileen Chang's fiction. Yet, as Lin laments the way many owners destroy the architectural style of these buildings by encasing the balconies and turning them into an enclosed space with ugly steel windows, he also acknowledges that, without the steel-framed enclosure, "when there are leaks and flooding during storm season, William Chang would not come and clean up the balconies for you" (Lin 2007: 37). William Chang is Wong Kar-wai's artistic director who single-handedly recreates, through painstaking details of period architecture, decor, and clothing, the nostalgic splendor in films like *In The Mood For Love*. Yet, as Lin observes, the aesthetic longing for the beauty of the past sometimes contradicts the pragmatic need for comfort and convenience in the present. Lin goes on to caution that even as we support preservation, we "should not become blinded by the nostalgia in Wong Kar-wai's films because buildings are not built for eyes to watch, but for bodies to inhabit in comfort" (Lin 2007: 37).

What is most interesting about recent films by younger directors is that, unlike their more famous predecessors, their works actually favor the bodily experience of living in an ever-changing urban environment over the visual splendor of cityscapes from the vanished past. Even nostalgic films like *Merry-Go-Round* (Clement Cheng and Yan Yan Mak, 2010) and *Big Blue Lake* (Jessey Tsang, 2011) focus on the *impossibility* of ever rendering the past, rather than engage in aesthetic efforts to recreate it. Films from the urban romance genre generally

show little interest in dwelling on the past. Instead, they accomplish something quite different: they dramatize on screen how the changing particulars of the city affect its inhabitants in the most intimate ways.

Love at Work: The Commute and the Smoking Break

To illustrate, I turn to a pair of seemingly very different films: the moody and melancholic *Claustrophobia* (Ivy Ho, 2008) and the cheeky, light-hearted *Love in a Puff* (Pang Ho-cheung, 2010). Each film portrays the nitty-gritty details of white collar work, the trials and tribulations of negotiating heterosexual romance, and the changing dynamics of urban living that are redrawing the boundaries of intimacy between young people in contemporary Hong Kong.

Claustrophobia is the directorial debut of acclaimed screenwriter Ivy Ho. Famous for her lyrical dialogues and intricate dramatic plot lines, Ho surprises her audience with a first film that relies more on mood and atmosphere than narrative development. In fact, the film's plot is minimal: it tells the story of a growing, but largely unexpressed, intimacy between a married manager, Tom, and one of his junior employees, Pearl. The narrative follows an episodic structure and leaves out crucial details between segments that unfold in reverse chronological order. Although an extra-marital affair (which may or may not have been consummated) is at its heart, the film is neither a morality tale nor a sexual drama. Rather, it illustrates an ambiguous experience of heterosexual intimacy amidst the urban changes of a city under economic stress.

The slippage between the film's English and Chinese titles, respectively "claustrophobia" and "intimacy" (*qinmi* 親密), is cleverly exploited to draw attention to the ambivalent nature of proximity. There are hints throughout the film that conditions for mid-level white-collar work in Hong Kong are deteriorating rapidly. During a meeting with potential mainland investors, Tom reminisces to Pearl about how promising it was during his early days at work, in contrast to the tough times currently. There is increased surveillance of workers, often from new investors from mainland China. Offices move further and further away to outlying areas where the rent is low. The company where Tom works, for instance, has recently moved to a location that is "not reachable by the MTR and costs a \$200 taxi ride from more central areas in the city." Thus, the spatial expansion of the city's commercial spaces ironically results in the contraction of an employee's lived experience of space as they are obliged to squeeze into a crowded car during the long commute and work punishing hours in isolated and crammed offices. The film shows that the proximity produced between people under these circumstances is both intimate and claustrophobic.

The opening shot shows a garage, through which Tom's car exits into the evening traffic. The section that follows, which lasts 23 minutes in total screen

time, follows the employees' daily commute. In his study of urban cinema, Yomi Braester identifies several distinct forms of camera work that recur in urban films: for example, recurrent alternation between extreme long shots of built environment and point-of-view shots that replicate the city dweller's experience of living in that environment (Braester 2012: 348), and pervasive tracking shots depicting the experience of roaming around the city (349–350). In *Claustrophobia*, these visual strategies are deployed to highlight the contrast between the expanse of the urban commute and the tight proximity of the commuters. Wide shots of the car moving through the city alternate with medium and close-up shots of the employees cramped in the car, where sexual and professional tension is constantly about to erupt. Tracking shots that follow the car's movement across the city make sure that the actual course of the commute is identifiable to local audience. This long segment follows the car as it leaves the company's office in Wong Chuk Hang in southern Hong Kong Island, through the Aberdeen tunnel, passing through Wan Chai and Causeway Bay, then through the Cross-Harbor Tunnel into Kowloon, and heading north towards the New Territories. Tom drops off each colleague along the way, until only Pearl is left, as they drive through the Lion Rock tunnel into Shatin. Thus, the film carefully places the intimate and claustrophobic experience of the commuters very specifically within Hong Kong's cityscape.

The lighting of this first segment is gloomy, accentuating the tension and repressed passion within the confined space of the car and in the darkness of the evening. As the film goes backward in time, however, the lighting brightens and there are more actions set during the day and in outdoor locations that open into an expansive vista. There is, moreover, a promise of developing intimacy in these spacious settings: a pier at Sai Kung where it is hinted that Pearl may have gone to meet Tom during his golf getaway and where she meets a kind taxi driver during a storm; the waterfront walkway outside of the office where Pearl develops her friendship with the taxi driver; the rooftop of the company where Pearl and Tom have a heartfelt conversation during a fire scare.

The chronologically reverse narrative creates a contradictory experience for the audience. On the one hand, the plot unfolds to reveal what leads ultimately to the repression and termination of Tom and Pearl's attraction in the end. On the other hand, the audience experiences the narrative form in reverse, thus in actuality going from darkness to light, from tension to connection, from claustrophobia to spaciousness, from despair to hopefulness. This formal contradiction echoes the ambivalent condition of heterosexual monogamy as depicted in the film. It is never made clear whether Tom's marriage is happy or how passionate is the attraction between him and Pearl. In this way, the film refrains from manipulating the audience into either rooting for or rejecting Tom and Pearl's potential union. Instead, the film seems more interested in simply provoking the question of whether, and how, one should approach the intimacy that is produced in the claustrophobic space of the cramped, isolated office and the long commute.

Stylistically unlike *Claustrophobia* in every way, *Love in a Puff* nonetheless tackles a similar set of themes: white-collar work, the vicissitude of heterosexual romance, and new spaces of intimacy. The film takes as its point of departure the implementation of a new health ordinance in January, 2007 that bans smoking in all indoor workplaces. As a consequence, an outdoor smoking-break culture begins to form. People from different walks of life come together as they congregate in alleyways to smoke. In effect, the ordinance has created a new spatial connector between work spaces. The community of smokers featured in the film consists of several advertising executives, a pizza delivery man who is South Asian, a waitress who is an immigrant from mainland China, a bell hop, and a Sephora saleswoman. The film tells the story of the blossoming romance between advertising executive Jimmy and saleswoman Cherie.

Love in a Puff is also episodic in structure, consisting of seven segments, each of which follows one day of the courtship during its first week. Embedded in this structure are three other types of narrative. First, faux documentary footage of interviews with Jimmy and Cherie's friends are inserted to provide day-to-day details of this white-collar world, such as the competitiveness of the advertising world, the ennui of working in sales, and details of sexual habits and rules of courtship. The second and third types of narrative inserts are scenes that dramatize the stories and gossip told by the "smoking citizens" around their "hotpot" everyday. Most famous of these scenes is the film's opening "gag": the sequence unfolds with all the generic expectations of a horror film, only to be revealed that it is a ghost story told enthusiastically by the pizza delivery man Bittu. Equally famous is the gossip told by Jimmy's colleague about how Jimmy discovered his ex-girlfriend cheated on him when she arrived at a party with another man's pubic hair visibly stuck on her bracelet. This salacious story, told with clever innuendo and dirty swear words, gives an unprecedentedly frank portrayal of the ingenious and playful ways in which Cantonese is used by Hong Kong's middle-class. This highly local use of language continues in another activity, texting, which becomes a main means of connection between Jimmy and Cherie when they are outside of the smokers' circle. The film often shows close-up of their texts, which combine the use of English, Chinese, Cantonese slangs, and digital language. Like the newly formed smoking culture, storytelling, gossip-mongering, and texting emerge in the film as means of connection between people who otherwise have little in common and whose paths may never have crossed. They are also uniquely local forms of communication that showcase Cantonese as a cinematic language that is not reducible to a dubbed Mandarin version. Like *La Comédie Humaine*, *Love in a Puff* creates a cinephilia that privileges the original Cantonese version.

Unlike *Claustrophobia*, the geographical setting of *Love in a Puff* does not replicate an actual movement across the city. The film's geography is actually an undisguised pastiche that provides another insider joke. When Cherie first meets Jimmy, she tells him that she works at Sephora. Jimmy looks surprised and asks, "Is there a Sephora around here?" In fact, the only Sephora store (now closed) that opened in Hong

Kong was in Mongkok, but none of Mongkok's landmarks are visible in the film's setting. As Pang details in his blog, the alleyway where the romance takes place is composed of shots of an alleyway in Tsim Sha Tsui, one near Admiralty, and an overpass in an industrial area in Kowloon Bay (Pang 2010). Jimmy's response tips the audience to the patchwork geography of the romance. Not unlike the pieced-together fragments of faux interviews, storytelling, gossip-mongering, and texting in the film, the quasi-fictional, cut-up urban scenes serve to provide the audience with new and entertaining ways of imagining connections and belonging.

Whereas *Love in a Puff* is distinctively located in the alleyways of Hong Kong's smoking-break culture, its sequel, *Love in the Buff* (Pang Ho-cheung, 2012), illustrates the *dislocation* many white-collar workers experience as a result of shrinking economic opportunities at home and the lure of upward mobility north of the border. Paralleling director Pang's own move to Beijing for work, the sensibility of the sequel has also moved northward. The plot has Jimmy and Cherie relocating to Beijing, now seen as a city of opportunities in contrast to the professional "dead end" in Hong Kong. In the film, the characters interact primarily in Mandarin. There is potential for the film to capture the street-level color and timbre of communication between Mandarin and Cantonese speakers in the sparkling and lively ways that characterize the dialogue of the previous film, but *Love in the Buff* does not capitalize on that potential. Instead, the dialogue is written in a generic fashion, with very little attempt at capturing local slangs or word play. In this sequel, the romance of Jimmy and Cherie is no longer tied to their streets,



Figure 11.1 Jimmy and Cherie in *Love in a Puff* (Pang Ho-cheung, 2010). DVD still.

and the local colors that characterize their interactions in the first film seem to have vanished in a puff as the lovers stop smoking. Instead, the movement between Hong Kong and Beijing drives the film's plot, a theme that recurs as Hong Kong filmmakers themselves work more and more often across the border. What kinds of love are being imagined along this Hong Kong–Beijing axis?

Migrant Love: Tales of Two Neighborhoods

In *Comrades, Almost a Love Story* (Peter Chan, 1996), Li Qiao, a hard-working woman from Guangzhou, gradually climbs her way up the economic ladder in Hong Kong and views the pinnacle of her achievement as the moment she can “pass” as a Hong Kong woman. The film represents a perspective on migrant life that is specific to the circumstances of the 1980s and 1990s, when Hong Kong was still perceived to be in a position of economic and cultural advantage *vis-a-vis* China. In a detailed study of how mainland women have been imagined in Hong Kong cinema, Yang Meiyan suggests that the evolving images, from tragic victim and sexual predator to entrepreneurial heroine and idealized muse, are all underwritten by a narrative about the relation between China and Hong Kong. As the power dynamics between the two regions have shifted radically since the release of *Comrades*, it is no surprise that not only images of women, but migrant life across the border in general, are undergoing a sea change. Two recent romance films, *Crossing Hennessy* (Ivy Ho, 2010) and *A Beautiful Life* (Andrew Lau, 2011), have provoked comparisons to *Comrades*. As Ho penned the script of *Comrades*, *Crossing Hennessy* may well be a screenwriter's directorial “retake” of the story. *A Beautiful Life*, on the other hand, is an update to *Comrades*, featuring a reverse trajectory that is the new reality: it is now a Hong Kong woman who is a migrant seeking her fortune in Beijing. My discussion will focus on the films' contrasting geographical imagination and the ways in which each film “places” intimacy along the Hong Kong–Beijing axis. It is also tempting to view the films as opposite stances on the future of the industry: as *A Beautiful Life* idealizes a movement towards Beijing, *Crossing Hennessy* makes an affectionate case for remaining in Hong Kong.

A Beautiful Life opens with a tracking shot following the traffic into the nightlife of Beijing, then cuts to the inside of a karaoke bar in Sanlitun, a hip and cosmopolitan area of Beijing known for its clubs, bars, and upscale shopping malls. The two protagonists, whose chance meeting in the karaoke sows the seed of a long and crisis-ridden romantic entanglement, inhabit this space differently. Li Peiyu, a Hong Kong woman trying to build a real-estate career in Beijing and living an expensive life off an affair with a married man, navigates the bar scene with facility and familiarity. Despite being local, Fang Zhengdong, a Beijing-born policeman, looks uncomfortable and is clearly out of place with the surroundings. The film takes pains to reinforce this contrast continuously through the characters' habitat. In the

sequence after the karaoke meeting, scenes of Li's modern but sterile highrise condo, messily strewn with objects of her luxury lifestyle, are followed by images of the courtyard house where Zhengdong lives with his younger brother. Zhengdong is associated with the "old Beijing," portrayed to be one of family continuity (the house is left to the brothers by their parents) and community (the courtyard is shared by neighbors who also have long-standing roots in the neighborhood). As the romantic narrative unfolds, it becomes clear that the contrast is also meant as a critique of Hong Kong migrants in China, like Peiyu, whose sole aspiration is for the *new* Beijing, signified by conspicuous consumption, sensual indulgence, and irresponsibility. Peiyu's initial relation with Zhengdong verges on being exploitative as she leverages his attraction for favors and money. The selfless Zhengdong is further idealized through tropes of disability and care-taking. Zhengdong's world consists of his autistic brother, his brother's mute girlfriend, and Zhengdong's best friend who is a blind musician. It is later revealed that even Zhengdong himself has a degenerative disease that will lead to early onset of dementia. The film's portrayal of disability, however, departs from how disability has been coded on Western screen: either, as McRuer has famously argued, in association with queerness (McRuer 2006) or, as Barounis has observed from more recent examples, with remasculinization (Barounis 2009). In *A Beautiful Life*, disability is instead made synonymous with *care-taking*: all the disabled characters in the film, male or female, are also themselves carers. Zhengdong's world signifies an idealized community of mutual care-taking and unconditional love that the film associates with old Beijing and contrasts with the world that Peiyu seeks when she moves north. Ultimately, Zhengdong's disability becomes a litmus test of redemption for the able-bodied, materialistic, and disloyal Hong Kong migrant.

After Peiyu loses money that Zhengdong has lent her (and causes him to lose his parental house), she runs back to Hong Kong in a cowardly way. As a setting, Hong Kong appears in the film, literally, as an unwelcoming and inhospitable closet: the claustrophobic space that Peiyu's unsympathetic brother confines her to at his home. When Peiyu finds the courage to leave Hong Kong again, Zhengdong, whose health and mental state have deteriorated, has moved with his brother and his brother's girlfriend to a village house in Muntougou, a rural area in West Beijing. This new setting is an extension of the courtyard house Zhengdong used to live in, with even clearer associations with remnants of the old Beijing. In this way, the film not only reverses the direction of the migrant journey in *Comrades*, it furthermore displaces its *telos*: Peiyu's journey from Hong Kong to Beijing to Muntougou does not lead her to a better life in materialistic terms, but parallels her transformation from a selfish woman in search of economic advancement to the film's vision of a selfless but emotionally fulfilled carer.

While the film's critical portrayal of Hong Kong migrants in Beijing may be breaking some new ground, what it offers as an alternative is highly nostalgic and implausible. The portrayal of Peiyu's life in Muntougou glosses over the harsh demands a primary carer in a non-urban setting would doubtless face in

a low-income household with very demanding medical needs. The film is not interested in exploring these aspects; it depicts disability as well as village life merely as metaphors for Peiyu's redemption. In the last sequence, after the couple have both survived health problems, Peiyu and a mentally deteriorating Zhengdong walk contentedly with their baby on the rural streets of Mentougou amidst a bustling scene of friendly villagers. Is this the film's vision for what a Hong Kong migrant should seek when heading north in search of a better life? Needless to say, the film was not particularly well received in Hong Kong. In fact, many critics and audience members were offended by its treatment of Hong Kong, both as a city and as a "character" embodied by Peiyu initially (Tang 2011; Chan 2011: 78–79). It appears that the northbound filmmaker now views Hong Kong as both a suffocating place from which to escape, as well as a morally weak character in need of redemption. Most of all, in his "placing" of intimacy, he has abandoned street-level nuance in favor of nostalgic and metaphorical broad strokes.

Crossing Hennessy's deliberately limited geographical imagination provides a good antidote to *A Beautiful Life*. Set entirely in Wan Chai, the film depicts a neighborhood within the day-to-day milieu of a modern, metropolitan city. It conceives of urban connections without nostalgia, much in the same way *Love in a Puff* shows storytelling, gossip-mongering, and texting as new means of connections for young urbanites. *Crossing Hennessy's* neighborhood consists of middle-class owners of small businesses, whose daily lives intersect as much through petty bickering as genuine kindness and a shared concern for their next generation. At the beginning of the film, the romantic protagonists – Loy, the son of a successful appliance shop owner and Oi Lin, the niece of a hardware store owner – are being match-made against their will. Loy is an only son to a successful business woman. The family business ensures he does not have to worry about his livelihood. Nor does he have to worry about anything else as his unmarried aunt devotedly takes care of all his domestic needs. Loy's good fortune, however, also breeds his shame: he is a version of the "failed man" (*feinan* 廢男) that has come to symbolize a generation of Hong Kong men who have been brought up under excessive protection. Loy is completely aware of his "failures": he recalls not being able to get out of bed even to go to his father's deathbed, and he realizes that his ex-girlfriend treats him more as a "pillow" than someone she loves and respects. Unlike in *A Beautiful Life*, however, this flawed character who embodies certain characteristics of Hong Kong is not in need of redemption. Rather, he comes to see his own worth through falling in love. Loy's romantic antagonist, Oi Lin, also represents a new generation: that of a migrant woman whose identity is no longer defined by a search for a better life or an aspiration to becoming a "real" Hong Konger. Instead, Oi Lin, who migrated from mainland China to live with her uncle and aunt in Hong Kong when her parents died, occupies a marginal space that straddles between belonging and alienation, much more reminiscent of the stories told in the anthology *Also Hong Kongers* (Cheng 2009) than of a film like *Comrades*. She tells Loy about her lonely girlhood, how it drives her to long for a protector which she sees in her violence-prone boyfriend, the fellow outsider A Xu.

The slow coming together of Loy and Oi Lin in the film is driven by two sets of circumstances. First, they both escape into fantasies through their love for detective novels. Loy has a penchant for imagining possible crime from scenes on the street and seeing his dead father talking to him, while Oi Lin loses herself in fiction to endure the boredom of work or the intense temper of her boyfriend. Ironically, even though they bond through a sense of humor and a taste for the fantastic, their romance is actually about leaving fantasies behind to face each other as ordinary people in real life. Neither protector nor muse, they become each other's beloved as lucky if lonely people who have lazy habits or teeth that need fillings, who are kind and decent and can make each other laugh. This very ordinary journey is borne out by a second factor: their geographical journey does not involve a heroic move like the one in *A Beautiful Life*. Loy's and Oi Lin's respective workplaces (both small businesses owned by their relatives) are located north and south of Hennessy Road, a major thoroughfare that bridges Central to Causeway Bay. As the title suggests, the mundane act of crossing the street is both a literal and metaphorical way in which they very gradually cross into the emotional center of each other's life.

The film also decenters the romance to give significant focus to the cast of characters that surround their lives: relatives, co-workers, hairdressers, teahouse waiters. These living and breathing inhabitants of the neighborhood have backstories of their own and are not just happy-looking props in the background. Most significantly, at the time of the film's production, the Urban Renewal Authority was



Figure 11.2 Oi Lin and Loy in *Crossing Hennessy* (Ivy Ho, 2010). DVD still.

redeveloping Lee Tung Street despite long-standing efforts of heritage activists who petitioned for the preservations of the street's old houses. *Crossing Hennessy* draws attention to the street's fate by including many panning shots of the area cordoned off to be redeveloped. In the sequence after A Xu beats up Loy for not "being man enough to protect Oi Lin" and in the final sequence when Loy runs from his mother's wedding to find Oi Lin in the tea house, the camera shows Loy running along the street, now completely walled off by temporary partition with color posters of the Urban Renewal Authority's illustrated plans for the street's future looks. In both sequences, Loy is accepting his own worth despite his flaws. By placing Loy's moments of self-actualization against the backdrop of the city amidst ceaseless redevelopment, the film depicts a resilience and a faith in the life pulse of a neighborhood that will nonetheless continue because of its inhabitants.

The film's ending further decenters the romance to focus on the city's streetscape as an important character on its own. The concluding sequence comprises a series of empty shots of all the places Loy and Oi Lin frequent: Honolulu Tea House, where they share their love of detective fiction and fantasies, the street corner where both have wandered around in despair, tram stops where Loy has seen Oi Lin off, the pedestrian overpass where Oi Lin cries in despair. Thus, unlike *A Beautiful Life*, which sets its drama between a ruthless hunt for a piece of the economic pie in cold and heartless urban spaces and a redemptive recovery of old Beijing and sacrificial love in a rural town, *Crossing Hennessy* pays homage to an ordinary neighborhood that is pulsating with life despite the upheavals of urban changes. It suggests that instead of searching elsewhere for a nobler life, it may be better simply to stay put, to accept oneself and get to know one's neighbors and streets and, above all, to live a love far less extraordinary.

All Cut Up: Shooting the Heartbroken City

While *Break Up Club* (Barbara Wong, 2010), a film about the on-again, off-again romance of a young couple Flora and Joe, is a generation apart from the romance in *Crossing Hennessy*, the two films actually tackle similar issues. Joe is arguably a younger version of Loy: an amiable young man who is unambitious and incapable of accomplishment. He goes from one part-time job to another, quitting when he feels bored, but is kind-hearted and obviously devoted to his girlfriend. Flora grows up poor in Tin Shui Wai, a neighborhood close to the border that is infamous for its social problems, and aspires towards a better life. The relationship is thrown into a crisis when Flora is asked by her boss to assist Lies, a famous Laos-born artist who sees something special in her and offers her a future in his accomplished, ambitious, and cosmopolitan life. Flora's romantic dilemma resembles a broader anxiety about the current state of Hong Kong: should one stay and accept mediocrity and lack of opportunities, or leave for greener pastures elsewhere?



Figure 11.3 Flora and Joe in *Break Up Club* (Barbara Wong, 2010). DVD still.

What is most interesting about *Break Up Club*, and distinguishes it from other teen romance, is the significant role filmmaking plays in the plot. The romance is framed by a meta-narrative about a director Barbara Wong and producer Lawrence Cheng (played by the real life director and producer of the film) looking for inspiration for their next romance film. They invite young people to shoot scenes from their love life as ideas pitch for their movie. After Joe and Flora's first breakup, Joe tells his story to the director and is asked to film his story with Flora. Throughout the first section of the film, we see Joe filming frequently with his DV camera. After the couple gets back together, however, Joe is worried that Flora does not want to be filmed for a project, so he returns the equipment to Wong without any of the footage he has filmed. Unbeknown to him, his filmmaker friend Sunny makes an arrangement with Wong to secretly follow and capture Joe's and Flora's relationship on screen. Sunny plants secret cameras in their home and follows them around with a secret crew, documenting their every move. Towards the end of the film, the audience is shown that many scenes of what they see on screen are actually shown from the perspective of one of Sunny's secret cameras.

The entire film, then, is cut up into various kinds of footage shot from different points of view: from Joe's own camera (which the audience is aware of), from Sunny's secretly planted cameras as well as those filmed by the crew in secret (unbeknown to the audience), as well as the all-seeing narration of the actual film's point of view. The audience is only shown the "reveal" at a scene in the airport where Joe, his leg in a cast,

hobbles through the airport to beg Flora not to leave, to no avail. As Joe cries, the camera pulls back to reveal that the scene is a movie being shown at a test screening, where Joe is finally being told of Sunny's secret arrangement with the director.

This gimmick is significant not only as an entertaining plot line to surprise the audience. More importantly, it draws attention to the power of filmmaking as a form of memory-making, even when its motivation, execution, or aesthetic value may all be dubious. At the end of the film, what finally convinces Flora to abandon her trip to Barcelona (and a potential future with Lies) is the footage on the DV camera that Joe gives to her as a memento. As she watches fragmented scenes of their relationship, all "placed" across different corners of the city from karaoke bars to shopping malls to the harbor front, she becomes convinced that her love lies with these memories rather than with the foreign adventures Lies promises her. In "duping" the audience into watching the secret docudrama shot by Sunny for the fictional Barbara Wong, which in effect makes up most of the film the audience sees, *Break Up Club* also forces the audience to momentarily occupy Flora's place. In effect, the film challenges the audience to see filmmaking itself as a means to redeem a broken relationship through memory-making. The collective memory of a city captured in fragments on film is not always pretty. It may sometimes even be unethical in motivation and shoddy in execution. Yet, like Joe's footage, it is nonetheless what most emotionally connects a lover to her beloved, and a people to their city. It may ultimately be that which can most powerfully convince them that in the long run, it is worth staying for.

Conclusion: Love of a Fallen Cinema

In an impressive study of film locations in Hong Kong cinema, independent researcher Kei Fu suggests that "our impressions of the city through films often feels more real than our actual experience" (Kei 2009: 9). Indeed, when a city has the good fortune of having been an active and dynamic character in a cinema as rich and diverse as Hong Kong's, its presence on film becomes a significant form of collective urban memory. Such memory can "feel more real" than actual experience when the actual cityscape changes so rapidly, when there is no concerted and systematic efforts at preservation, and when local culture and heritage do not play a major part in civic education.

Thus, whether it is an atmospheric rendering of a claustrophobic commute across the city, a playful dramatization of alleyway smoking culture, a loving portrayal of the romantic shenanigans in a Wan Chai neighborhood, or a postmodern pastiche of a young couple's sites of heartbreak, these fragments of fictional urban life form part of a cinematic memory of how the city is experienced at moments of change. In this way, these films are also relevant to heritage activism.

In a series of reflections on Hong Kong's streets, literary historian Lu Wei-luan criticizes the "dull or frivolous" character of many projects that attempt to document Hong Kong's urban history. By contrast, she praises an arts project in Taipei that "professionally and lovingly documents the process of a city in massive transformation" through *creatively* rendering the daily changes of streets in the city (Lu, 1996: 20). By portraying the trial and tribulations of romantic love as it is impacted at, literally, the street level, these urban romance films also accomplish the kind of creative documentation that Lu lauds.

As the whispers of the death of Hong Kong cinema continue, one wonders whether Hong Kong as a main character will also begin to disappear on-screen. Being a subject of creative documentation, having the nuance and complexity of its changes dramatized on screen, is a privilege not enjoyed by too many cities in the world. Only a handful of other cities (New York or Tokyo, for instance) have had treatment comparable to what Hong Kong has enjoyed. In my adopted home, Vancouver, which houses a vibrant film industry but one that mainly serves the needs of the far more powerful cinema across the border in the US, the city finds itself primarily as a stand-in and not a main character on screen. In the program notes to "On Location," an exhibition where writer and artist Michael Turner compiles scenes of Vancouver in over 167 films, the sentiment expressed is directly opposite to that of Kei Fu's: "Over the years, film production has had a strong impact on Vancouver, conflating our understanding of the reality of the city with its filmic representation. Indeed, there is a perceived anxiety about a city that spends more time standing in for other cities than it does in 'playing' itself" (Vancouver Art Gallery 2011). Unlike Hong Kong, Vancouver rarely plays itself. Most often, it is "passing" as a generic North American city or a fictional town on a planet far, far away. For Vancouverites, our city on screen signals amnesia and distortion more than collective memory and urban documentation.

Whether Hong Kong cinema survives remains to be seen. It is a real possibility that it will soon share the fate of Vancouver and become a service-provider for the needs of a far more powerful cinema across the border. For now, even as a new generation of filmmakers struggle to survive and create locally, their efforts have not always been received positively. Many recent films, including those studied in this article, have been criticized for being overly local, self-indulgent, or unsuccessfully experimental. Apparently, this generation of Hong Kong films has potential but may be far too narrow in market appeal to sustain the current industry, too small to ensure that there will even be a future for their filmmakers to develop. A stylistically young cinema that must die before it can mature is perhaps best described as "untimely." As products of Hong Kong cinema's possible end times, these films' untimeliness serves, in my view, as the most powerful indictment of the grim circumstances of their production. In this sense alone, regardless of how successful they may be in commercial or artistic terms, they already deserve our love.

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Regulating Queer Domesticity in the Neoliberal Diaspora

Audrey Yue

Introduction

In *A Fighter's Blues* (Daniel Lee, 2000), Andy Lau plays a Hong Kong kickboxer in Thailand. At the height of his career, he accidentally threw a deadly punch and killed the nation's top fighter. The film begins after his thirteen-year stint in jail, and shows his attempt at redemption. He returns to Thailand to look for his love child, hides his boxer identity and spends time at an orphanage where his daughter lives. When he's spotted at her boyfriend's kickboxing competition, the Thai team challenges him to a duel. Despite having been out of action for over a decade and fighting a much younger opponent at his prime, he accedes. Dying in the duel, death is his ultimate atonement.

The film chronicles the re-making of the new man as he transforms from an irresponsible lover and accepts his role as a father. As he also realizes he has killed a national hero, he learns to respect a sport steeped in ritual and tradition. These modes of self-making are governed by the forces that shape the structure of the good family and the citizen-nation. Putting aside the film's inter-Asian geopolitics and concentrating on the melodrama of romance and action, the film's biggest message is the anti-hero's ability to re-educate his ways and re-make his self. Through humility, honesty, and loyalty, he slowly learns to better conduct of his actions. In his death, the migrant has earned the respect of his mixed-race daughter, his new girlfriend, and the host country. This essay will show how these modes of re-embodiment are central to the changing neoliberal conditions that regulate gender in the diaspora.

Theorizations of gender and diaspora have been a prolific field since the advent of New Hong Kong cinema studies in the late 1990s. Scholarship has examined female filmmakers who have made films about the diaspora, the representation of women as migrants and exiles, gendered processes of commodification and consumption, and themes of sexuality and performativity. This essay deploys queer and mobility studies to extend and depart from these approaches. I examine how neoliberalism affects migration through the regulation of queer domesticity. Queer domesticity refers to the queering of heteronormative domestic spaces (home, nation-state) through irregular migrant practices such as illegal migration, or non-heteronormative immigrant house-making practices. Heteronormativity is the naturalization of the gender paradigm through reinforcing oppositional sex roles and patriarchal ideologies. The regulation of queer domesticity refers to how these practices are contained and normalized through assimilative techniques of migrant incorporation.¹ This essay argues these techniques of regulation are exemplary of neoliberalism's relationship to migration. Neoliberalism, and its associative processes of self-regulation, economic rationalization, and citizen-making, is central to migration as a site of materialized mobility that creates re-embodied subjectivities.

Using key diasporic films from the 1990s and 2000s such as *Farewell China* (Clara Law, 1990), *Comrades, Almost a Love Story* (Peter Chan, 1996), *Happy Together* (Wong Kar-wai, 1997), *One Nite in Mongkok* (Derek Yee, 2004), *Night and Fog* (Ann Hui, 2009), and *Permanent Residence* (Scud, 2009) – films set in the diaspora with illegal migrants, and in Hong Kong with illegal migrants and gay protagonists, I critically show how queer domesticity is practiced. I then examine how these spaces regulate migrants and incorporate them as good citizens. I extend these discussions with a detailed case study of Jackie Chan's crime action thriller, *Shinjuku Incident* (Derek Yee, 2009).

The focus on this genre presents a new way to rethink the romantic melodrama and art house films that typify the diasporic film; using neoliberalism to approach the crime and gangster film is also a novel way to consider the status of the action film. The metaphor of action, as a practice of labor, will be integral to rethinking this field. Also innovative is the attention to masculinity. While scholarship has focused on masculinity in the diaspora (e.g., studies on the films of Jackie Chan, Jet Li, and Bruce Lee), none has examined diasporic masculinity through neoliberal migrant labor. The issues affecting neoliberal migrancy are pertinent to Hong Kong film futures, with its new modes of transnational filmmaking and in a re-nationalized Special Administrative Region (SAR) as a repository for Chinese migrant labor. Where neoliberalism in China is a national project of global reordering that has created new desires (Rofel 2007), this chapter argues in the diaspora it too has created new embodied subjectivities as an effect of the regulation of queer domesticity.

Chinese Diasporas in the West: Regulating Queer Domestic Spaces

The concept of queer domesticity has been theorized in historical accounts of diasporic settlement and home-making. In this chapter, I critically expand this application to consider the filmic texts and contexts of Hong Kong and its diasporas. Nayan Shah (2001) coins the term to refer to domestic spaces where men live together in bunk beds or women and children in female households in San Francisco's Chinatown at the turn of the nineteenth century. He examines how authorities associated these spaces with diseases and shows how public health policies were introduced to contain these aberrant living arrangements. Domesticity, he suggests, was regulated to create and make compliant citizen-subjects. These living arrangements, he argues, demonstrated Chinatown's deviant sexualities. His concept of queer domesticity conceptualizes "alternative arrangements" that do not conform to heteronormative gender roles and identities including those of intimacy and privacy (Shah 2001: 13, 79, 104). The following applies and extends this concept to two groups of films – films set in the Chinese diasporas in the West and the mainland diaspora in Hong Kong – to critically demonstrate how queer domesticity is regulated through the contemporary neoliberal imperatives of ideal citizenry.

The first group comprises films set in the West. This setting is a popular motif first noticeable with the migration melodramas of Hong Kong female directors Mabel Cheung and Clara Law (see e.g., Marchetti 2006; Ford 2011; Shen 2011). It has also been embraced by key filmmakers such as Stanley Kwan (*Full Moon in New York*, 1990), Andrew Lau (*Sausalito*, 2000), Fruit Chan (*Public Toilet*, 2003), and even found resonance in Tsui Hark's action gangster films such as *A Better Tomorrow 3* (1989). Soon after the 1997 handover, and when Hong Kong emigrants began returning to the city, and as film production begun to decelerate, Hong Kong filmmakers slowly began to eschew the setting of the Chinese diaspora and deal more with the theme of return, as in Clement Cheng and Yan Yan Mak's *Merry-Go-Round* (2010).

Farewell China is exemplary in this group. Made before the June 4 1989 Tian'anmen Square incident and released just after, the film uses the hysteria of the female Chinese protagonist to express the panic of the Hong Kong people as they prepared for their impending return to China. Set in New York, it shows the arrival of a Chinese student (Hong) to America and captures her descent into mental illness as she struggles to cope with racism, robbery and rape, earn a living, and go to school. Three prominent domestic spaces are set in New York, and through their alternative sexual arrangements, offer a new critical trajectory to read the film.

The first is Hong's basement bedroom, introduced from her ex-employer's flashback. This is a typical windowless room found in the basements of New York's tenements. The camera follows the employer's point-of-view as he climbs down the

stairs into a maze-like catacomb of rooms. As he and his wife jostle with an unruly group of multilingual tenants who had come out of their rooms to partake in the cacophony, the claustrophobic space intensifies the foreboding to come. With no sunlight or fresh air, the framing discards any establishing shot and camera close-ups capture the mould, the damp dripping off the blackened peeling paint. In the bedroom, they find, on the floor in a corner, a feverish Hong. This room is stereotypical of the illegal lodging of irregular migrants, with spatial aesthetics also shared in Mabel Cheung's *An Autumn's Tale* (1987). In these spaces, hordes of usually single people live together in close proximity, often sharing one toilet and kitchen, reminiscent of the nineteenth century Chinese households observed by Shah. Rather than the light-filled, expansive, heterosexual, and three-generational homes shared by Hong and Zhao in China, this room is dark and dank, befitting only the shadow economy of irregular migration. Its non-heteronormative domestic arrangement finds resonance with conservative discourses in the West that queer the conflation between illegal migration and homosexuality. In her examination of how anti-gay / anti-migration campaigns in the US use homoerotic images of immigrant men to create a homophobic panic, Mary Brady (2008) suggests that the homophobia that has preceded anti-immigrant hysteria is due to homosexuality's excess, an excess similarly embodied by the racialized sexuality of non-white people. Although this room is occupied by a married woman, its queer domestic arrangement is explicit through the illegal and non-familial structures of domesticity and intimacy. These tropes continue to function as a causal tool in the plot that shows Hong's sexuality become more excessive through arranged marriage, prostitution, and fraud. Against this context, it is not surprising that Hong's excessive sexuality, as Gina Marchetti suggests of the conservative film, is contained in the film's ending through her descent into madness (2006: 206).

Queer domestic structures are also further supported in the film in two other spaces. One is the room used by Zhao to pimp the young Chinese American runaway (Jane) he befriended; the other is Hong's Brooklyn apartment after she meets Zhao in a chance encounter. Although both spaces are heterosexualized – that is, these rooms are where heterosexual sex acts take place – they are non-heteronormative in their conduct of sexual and domestic intimacy. The first is a room for economic sexual exchange; whether it is sex between the fifteen-year-old Jane and her client, or a business transaction between the pimp and an under-aged schoolgirl, these acts, as practices of illegal prostitution, challenge the heterosexual family through improper intimacy and work. The second is a room also for sexual exchange; although Hong and Zhao have sexual intercourse as a married couple here, this intimacy is betrayed the next day through Hong's amnesia. She does not remember him and laments her anonymous sex with a Chinese man who cannot speak English. The nature of this “pick-up” resonates with gay cruising cultures and single hook-ups in the West. While the latter is becoming more widely accepted, in the contexts of the film – the late 1980s and early 1990s of the Chinese diaspora and Hong Kong – this practice is frowned upon because pre-marital sex in general, and extra-marital sex in particular,

destroy the sanctity and monogamy of marriage. The non-heteronormativity – or queerness – of this room is also evident in the disjunctive objects that inhabit this space: alongside photos of her family and marriage are a dirty mattress earlier salvaged from the street and piles of letters never sent. Rather than the linear model of family reunion, this room, and its attendant sexual and spatial practices, convey a non-teleological narrative of multiple and incompatible intimacies.

In the above, I have established how *Farewell China* queers domesticity in two ways: through single-sex and same-sex households that form the shadow economy of irregular migration; and through sexual practices in a domestic space that challenge the heteronormative intimacy of marriage, family, and monogamy. In the following, I show how queer domesticity is regulated as a space of neoliberal citizenry. It is necessary to first explain and contextualize Chinese queer neoliberalism.

In the West, neoliberalism has come to describe a range of ideas and processes in the economic, cultural, social, and political spheres, ranging from policy frameworks and personal discourses to a new form of imperialism and a new way of governing. In politics and economics, it is associated with the demise of the golden age of capitalism from the 1940s to the 1970s, and the crisis of capitalism that followed with the rationalizing strategies of Reagan and Thatcher, and consolidated in the administrations of Clinton and Blair (Steger and Roy 2010). At a socio-cultural level, its features include the devolution of welfare and responsibilities to individuals and families, a higher level of state intervention into individual lives, and the spread of economic rationality into aspects of life previously not considered economic (Brown 2003). In queer studies, neoliberalism refers to the process where sexual politics is linked to capitalism, and where rights-based claims to equality has reified same-sex marriage and the same-sex family as the ideals of devolved state responsibility and governance. In this framework, sexual politics has moved away from rights-based political activism towards a new normalization that emphasizes the rights of individuals (Duggan 2003). These tenets are also found in China, where neoliberalism has enabled the state to create a new global ordering of the economy (Harvey 2005: 120–151). At a socio-cultural level, it is characterized by the embodiment of desire through sex, consumer spending, and tastes (Rofel 2007: 21). While the status of homosexuality has remained ambiguous since its decriminalization in 1997, it is this ambiguity that is articulated as a right to desire. Treated as a right to desire, homosexuality, together with consumer desire and material wealth, is realigned as an example of the positive accumulation of desire that will help the national project create the cosmopolitan Chinese subject. In homosexual subcultures, the mainstream discourse of *suzhi* (quality) has been used to delineate right and wrong types of embodiments (Rofel 2007: 28; see also Kipnis 2007). Right embodiments include gay identities formed through cultural, intellectual, and consumer enrichments such as gay bars and consciousness-raising groups; wrong embodiments refer to the articulation of desire from rent boys, male prostitutes, and poor rural migrants.

Two gay films demonstrate the queer domestic practices discussed earlier but also show how these practices are contained by the neoliberal imperatives of good citizenry (*suzhi*).² In *Happy Together*, homosexuality is displaced onto the diasporic space of Buenos Aires shared by two stranded gay protagonists (Ho Po-wing and Lai Yiu-fai). In their apartment block, sexual practices challenge heteronormative ideologies of intimacy. The couple engage in anal sex, kiss in the shared toilet, and dance together in the communal kitchen. These practices bring private notions of intimacy to normative public spaces, queering these spaces with public gay intimacy (Siegel 2001). Despite these queering strategies, the film is framed by the self-regulating strategies of neoliberalism.

Po-wing and Yiu-fai characterize wrong and right embodiments respectively. Po-wing is the more daring of the pair; he is camp, hustles for money, enjoys polygamous anonymous sex, is financially irresponsible and has no desire to work. Yiu-fai is level-headed; he cooks, is faithful to his lover, looks after the welfare of Po-wing, and works hard to save the money needed for the return to Hong Kong. Elsewhere, I discussed Yiu-fai's straight-acting embodiment as a conservative discourse that conforms to Chinese Confucian patriarchy; and in such a discourse, homosexuality is othered in a space outside of the nation-state so that even upon his return at the end of the film, Yiu-fai arrives in Taiwan rather than Hong Kong (Yue 2000). Here, I extend this discussion to suggest that Yiu-fai fits the ambivalent logic of Chinese queer neoliberalism. While gay desire is expressed as a right to desire, this desire is normalized by the conservative straight-acting values demanded of a good citizen in a new Chinese state. Rather than the bad queer practices of Po-wing, the good conduct of Yiu-fai embodies the normative values of the family and its proper order of work and morality so that even as a homosexual, he is still a filial son and a reticent gay.

This ambiguity is more clearly demonstrated in *Permanent Residence*. In Ivan's Hong Kong apartment, where he and Windson shared six years of their lives together, queer domestic practices abound despite Windson's refusal to identify as gay and engage in homosexual sex. Sharing the same bed, Windson permits Ivan's sexual advances. In the Hong Kong neighborhood and on tour in the mainland, they kiss and embrace in parks, resorts, and gardens. Like *Happy Together*, straight public places are queered by these clandestine activities. Also like *Happy Together*, homosexuality is othered elsewhere, in Australia. A few years after the couple have parted ways, they meet again at a convention in Australia. In Australia Windson finally reveals his homosexual love for Ivan. However, homosexuality's excess is curtailed through Windson's death immediately after in a motorcycle accident. It is as if Windson is punished for coming out and declaring the truth of his desire. This accords with the way that queer Chinese neoliberalism is rationalized in Hong Kong. In the film's segments on Hong Kong, the gay pair mask the relationship as friendship and even as brotherly bond, reflecting the ways Chinese gay men often pass their sexual partnerships in public life (and sometimes even in private life, as in the film) and with family members. In the plot, Windson has a girlfriend

in the mainland he is supposed to marry; even Ivan, who later comes out as a homosexual, pretends to be straight at work and when talking with his grandmother. Ivan's inability to love another man, and his obsession with death, reflect the way that the truth of homosexual desire is associated with death, as it is literally with Windson, the bad queer. Working class and from a public housing background, Windson possesses the wrong types of embodiment: accused by others of making use of Ivan, his money and connections, and even jilting his girlfriend and abandoning his ailing parents, the penalty of death is a punishment not for being homosexual, but for being a failed son and husband-to-be. As the well-to-do good gay, Ivan possesses ideal qualities: he is the responsible one who looks after the family (not only his own brother but also Windson's sick mother), is gainfully employed and professionally successful. Even Ivan's brother encourages him to start a same-sex family. Despite the wanton display of queer domestic practices in his apartment, Ivan's homosexuality is regulated to produce the optimum qualities suited to the neoliberal regime of the new economy. For homosexuals unable to accumulate good qualities, such as Windson, the result is a death in an elsewhere space away from the nation-state.

In the above, I have established how queer domestic practices are regulated by neoliberal imperatives. In the films, the diaspora has become a space to articulate the sexual politics of Chinese queer neoliberalism: as an excentric space, the diaspora makes visible the ways that practices of queer domesticity are contained and governed through the self-regulating strategies of subjectivation and individualization, where the choice of homosexuality is organized not through the emancipatory logic of rights but by coordinating within it the new constraints and controls that are imposed, such as the dominant value of good citizenry supported by the homo-normalizing ideologies of marriage, family, and consumption that now sustain the Chinese state. These regulatory regimes designed to cultivate good citizenry are not only visible among overseas Chinese or marginal queer communities; they are also active in aspirational mainland migrant populations in Hong Kong keen to assimilate and partake in the good life offered by the state.

In the following, I combine the characteristics discussed above to further demonstrate how queer domesticity is regulated in the Chinese diaspora in Hong Kong. In particular, I show how neoliberal techniques of regulation rely on the politics of mobility to shape re-embodied subjectivities. Mobility is governed by movement and containment, and materialized through local and spatial rearrangements (Cresswell 2010). At the level of subjectivity, it is "about tracking the power of discourses and practices of mobility in creating both movement and stasis" and the means by which these discourses and practices shape processes of re-embodiment (Sheller and Urry 2006: 211). For Chinese migrants in Hong Kong, the politics of mobility is inseparable from new forms of neoliberal heteronormative (and homonormative) control, from the power of the Chinese nation-state and its ideologies of inequality to the multilayered structures of the migration system, and at the level of the social and individual bodies.

Mainland Diasporas in Hong Kong: The Politics of Mobility Governing Queer Domesticity

The films in the second group are set in the Chinese diaspora in Hong Kong. Hong Kong has long been a destination for Chinese migrants, and the country bumpkin “Ah Chan” mainland character stereotype became a staple in its cinema in the 1990s and 2000s. The three films chosen here for discussion – *Comrades*, *Almost a Love Story*, *One Nite in Mongkok*, and *Night and Fog* – are indicative not so much for their exemplary statuses in this group but the commonalities they share across the fifteen-year gap between them.

In *Comrades*, *Almost a Love Story*, queer domestic spaces are evident in the places where the two Chinese migrants (Li Xiaojun and Li Qiao) live and work. Xiaojun, a legal migrant, lives with his aunt in her house, in which other migrant workers live as sub-tenants, in particular, Thai sex workers. The congested and slum-like conditions of this dwelling are evident when he first arrives at the house and sees these women in various stages of undress, and his relief is clear when he is offered his own private bedroom. In this house even his aunt is single and has an active sex life with various men who freely come and go. Queer domestic arrangements are clearly evident: migrants, single women, and sex workers are deviant figures who challenge the intimacy of heterosexuality, and its familial and residentialist norms.³ The protagonists’ work places, while not strictly designed as home spaces, can also be considered queer domestic spaces. Xiaojun works in a Chinese restaurant kitchen. Although the Chinese restaurant is a significant domestic institution for Chinese families, who place a high status on dining together, its kitchen is usually a site of regular and irregular migrant and commodity flows, evident in media panics about trafficked labor and food security. He learns English in an English-language school, a center of colonial domesticity and an institution of the (British) mother tongue often desired and mirrored by postcolonial subjects such as those in Hong Kong. However, the school has an inebriated teacher whose lesson plan is to watch Hollywood films and learn expletives. This humorous subtext helps queer the domestic institution by mocking the rules of language and pedagogy. Qiao, a legal and then an illegal migrant, first works at McDonald’s and as a cleaner in the English-language school, and later at a massage parlor. Like the English-language school, these spaces are also sites of neocolonial and patriarchal domesticity: McDonald’s – a popular family restaurant from the West enjoyed by children; the massage parlor – a female service economy for male intimacy and sexual health. Qiao typifies the cheap female migrant labor that occupies these low-paid and abject industries of hospitality, cleaning, and sex. By transforming the normative institutions of family, language, and care into queer domestic economies of the migrant underclass, the protagonists’ precarious labor practices reveal the politics of mobility that govern migration. Whether these migrants are legal or illegal, these spaces and their queer domestic practices reveal the Hong Kong SAR

as an unequal place of inclusion and exclusion. Also functioning as centers of migrant capital accumulation, these spaces are sites of re-embodiment.

These spaces are the sites for generation of cultural capital for migrants eager to better their social status.⁴ Xiaojun learns English, appreciates Western food, and works hard to earn the money to sponsor his mainland girlfriend and marry her in a grand wedding. Qiao also works hard, but after losing money in a failed business venture, eventually becomes the girlfriend of a rich man. As “a land of opportunities” (a phrase used by Qiao), the capitalist ethos of Hong Kong rewards those willing to work hard, such as Xiaojun. In such a regime, border proximity to Hong Kong is inconsequential, such as in the case of Qiao, who although initially passes as a local because she speaks Cantonese and has the cultural capital of someone who has grown up watching Hong Kong television, is also subjected to the same system of labor that restricts the migrant underclass. When both later find themselves as new (and later illegal) migrants in New York, the same shadow economy continues to govern their practices of resettlement. As re-embodiment is a process where the migrant acquires a new subjectivity through new modes of bodily cultivation, it is in these practices of migrant accumulation that neoliberalism surfaces as a site of new inclusions and exclusions. As a result of hard work and employee loyalty, Xiaojun is sponsored by his ex-employer to New York to work in his restaurant. However, as a result of running away with her gangster boyfriend and escaping from the law, Qiao is left penniless and alone in New York. Xiaojun’s legality is reflected in his proper status as a married husband while Qiao’s illegality is reflected in her improper status as the bereaved mistress of an underworld criminal. Although the film ends happily, with the two protagonists reuniting, the last frame in the film reveals the politics of right and wrong embodiments. This is the same frame that opens the film, showing the arrival of Xiaojun in Hong Kong; however, in the last frame, the camera zooms out to show Qiao also arriving in Hong Kong on the same train. After alighting, both (who do not know each other yet) choose to walk in opposite directions towards the new city. This motif shows how migrants can succeed if they embody right qualities such as proper residency status, hard work, and thrift. Xiaojun embodies these neoliberal values while Qiao, who tries to take short cuts and aberrant routes, is punished for embodying the wrong qualities. This irony is evident in the new ordering of race, class, and nationality in New York: after cleverly out running the police in Hong Kong, Qiao’s boyfriend dies from a senseless stabbing by African-American street kids; Qiao, who has spent much of her time in Hong Kong trying to pass as a Cantonese-speaking local, works as a Mandarin-speaking ferry tour guide for the newly rich mainland tourists visiting the Statue of Liberty. These spaces, discourses, and practices show how the politics of mobility is indeed shaped and reshaped by race, sex, sexuality, class, and nationality.

Such politics are more accentuated in *One Nite in Mongkok* and *Night and Fog*. In the former, Chinese migrants such as Dan Dan acquire a short-stay visa and go to Kowloon’s Mongkok to make fast money, usually through sex work and illegal crime. In the latter, Chinese migrants such as Ah Leng work as hostesses in border

towns and after finding Hong Kong men to marry, move across the border to make a home in the New Territories' town of Tin Shui Wai. In both films, queer domestic spaces are evident in the settings of private rooms and apartments as well as public precincts. In *One Nite in Mongkok*, the cheap hotel room is a temporary home for short stay migrants. By servicing clients in these rooms, they also create workspaces. Unlike high-end tourist hotel rooms, these rooms are seedy and dirty, and mirror the deviant status accorded its inhabitants. Sex, violence, drugs, and crime flow seamlessly in and out of these spaces. Mongkok is a high-density district of illegal trade and people, as evident in the film, from the peddling of counterfeit goods to attempted underworld killings and police car chases. In *Night and Fog*, the two dominant domestic spaces are also filled with violence, crime, and sex. The flat occupied by Ah Leng and her Hong Kong husband is the location of rape, battery, incest, and family murder. The women's refuge, where Ah Leng has sought shelter, is also a halfway house for victims of domestic violence. Tin Shui Wai is a new border town with an unusually large population of Chinese migrants, high unemployment, and social dysfunction. In both films, heteronormative domestic spaces, from the micro sites of rooms and apartments to the macro sites of districts and towns, are queered by Chinese migrancy and its practices of re-embodiment; in particular, the female migrant's body has become "a cultural, aesthetic, and historical prism through which Chinese modernity and its relationship to global modernity (or modernities) can be looked at anew" (Lu 2007: 2, parenthesis in original).

Chinese sex workers and mainland brides exemplify the neoliberal global biopolitics that shape contemporary Chinese modernity.⁵ As unskilled female labor, Chinese women are increasingly forced to leave China in search of work to supplement farming income that has been diminished by rapid modernization. Many, like the films' protagonists, resort to sex work or succumb to sex trafficking. Similarly, with the increasing border trade between Hong Kong SAR and the mainland, Chinese women, like Ah Leng, are also sought after as more compliant wives or mistresses of Hong Kong businessmen. While female migrant mobility has been enabled by the globalization of sex and sexuality, unequal patriarchal border regimes continue to regulate their practices of re-embodiment. Dan Dan and Ah Leng silently accept their respective pimp's and husband's beatings and rape; even the Tin Shui Wai police and social workers fail to promptly save Ah Leng after repeated reports and testimonies against her husband. As sex workers and mainland wives, Chinese migrant women's lives are devalued in Hong Kong. However, like Xiaojun and Qiao, all are eager to succeed. Dan Dan repeats Qiao's favorite phrase by calling Hong Kong "a paradise which has everything" and Ah Leng's parents, like Hong's and Zhao's parents in *Farewell China*, instruct her to tolerate the hardship and not to return, even after witnessing the brutal aggression of their son-in-law as he bashes the family dog to a bloody pulp. These films use the female migrant body to show the desperation of migrants trying to do the right thing and become the ideal citizen-subject (as good worker and wife), and the failures of these accumulation strategies when differences in region (between the city center

and rural periphery), sex, sexuality, and class determine the conditions of mobility. In this ordering, new regimes of heteronormative domesticity regulate migrant conduct. As sex workers and mainland brides, and without proper and right qualities, low-value migrants disappear into the disposable underclass of immaterial and affective labor; in its extremities, the excesses of their sexualities are curtailed through violence and death.

The films also problematize the ethical practices of re-embodiment. Take for example, the narrative of Lai Fu in *One Nite in Mongkok*. Arriving in Hong Kong to look for his injured girlfriend, he is forced into a spiral of crime. In order to find her, he becomes a hitman wanted by the police. At the film's end, he is accidentally shot by a policeman, not when carrying out the planned assassination but avenging the honor of his day-old friend, Dan Dan. Rather than running off with the large sum of blood money and escaping the police and local triads, he confronts them in a shootout that leads to his death. The excess of his archaic loyalty, both to Dan Dan and his girlfriend, appear anachronistic in Mongkok, a district that also functions as a microcosm of metropolitan Hong Kong.

The film asks: What kind of conduct is appropriate and what are the costs of proper re-embodiment? In the final section, I further explore how genre and masculinity function in the action film, such as that of *One Nite in Mongkok*, to champion the anti-hero migrant through the atonement of death. To illustrate this, I use *Shinjuku Incident*, a more recent film from the same director, Derek Yee.

In the Chinese–Japanese Diaspora: Migrant Masculinity and Action Cinema

Shinjuku Incident is a contemporary immigrant thriller that chronicles the life of a group of illegal Chinese migrants in Japan. Following in the Sino-cinematic trend of Hong Kong films trying to capture a bigger trans-China market, the film avoids Hong Kong and Hong Kong characters. It begins with the arrival of the film's male protagonist, Steelhead, on the shores of Wakasa Bay in search of his childhood sweetheart, Xiu Xiu. After realizing he cannot find her, he continues to get on with his life. With the help of his other illegal migrant Chinese friends, he survives with odd jobs and through entrepreneurial finesse, rises to the top of Chinese triad hierarchy and obtains legal resident status.

Jackie Chan plays the Chinese farmer Steelhead. This "new role" (Chu 2009: 5) is "a rare straight dramatic outing" (Edwards 2009: 20) for the film star. While commanding top billing, he does not fight in the film. Where his previous films center on the *kung fu* comedy genre he has so successfully institutionalized, this gangster thriller shows action through a plot filled with guns, machetes, gangland rivalries, and detective hunts. Although the film's violence has led to its banning in China and a rating of Category III in Hong Kong (the first for a Chan film), it

reflects the transformation of Chan “from stuntman and fighter to unlikely leading man and role model” (Gluckman 2011: 40).

Theorizations of Chan’s stardom and action have focused on masculinity and identity. Arriving in the scene in the wake of Bruce Lee’s sudden death, his unique *kung fu* style was described as a “blend of slapstick, inventive acrobatics and sense of adventure” (Teo 1997: 123). Unlike the hard body of Lee, Chan’s action is staged through the spectacle of the *mise-en-scène* (Tasker 1997). The representation of his body as “soft” has also been considered a “sublime” metaphor for postcolonial Hong Kong identity (Lo 1996; 2001). His vulnerable body attests to his appeal to both female and male audiences (Shu 2003). In Hollywood, his films have cultivated black audiences and his diasporic Chinese identity has functioned as a buffer between black and white America (Marchetti 2001). His age and race have also been discussed as a barrier in the West (Holmlund 2010); hence, the more recent focus on the use of special effects in his films is highlighted to show “his ability to morph and, sometimes in subtle ways, to keep pace with audiences’ changing demands and their shifting demographics, while maintaining the highly appealing star persona that he has cultivated through the years” (Chan 2009: 130). It is within this context that Chan has emerged as a role model of ideal citizenry.

In the 1980s, Chan’s popularity soared across the regional Asian film circuit and amongst its audiences because he exploited the image of a good citizen in his films by borrowing on the stereotypical values accorded to Asian tradition and culture, and exhibiting goodwill and role-modelling discourses (Jeeson 2009). This cultivation has grown exponentially since the 1990s, seeing Chan become the spokesperson for all types of public and private institutions, in sports, culture, education, philanthropy, industry, across Hong Kong, China, Asia, and the West, culminating with his standing as the highest-profile Goodwill Ambassador of the 2008 Beijing Olympics. Even on social media, fans reconstructed his stardom based not only on his kinetic body but his “ambassadorial agency” (Lau 2010: 15). For young children growing up in Asia and the West, these endorsements have provided a cultural model for constructing citizenship (Zuengler 2003). It is thus not surprising he was the winner of the 2011 Kids Choice Award for *The Karate Kid* (Harald Zwart, 2010). *Shinjuku Incident* vehicles this persona of Chan as the ideal citizen, evident in his transformation from illegal to legal migrant.

When Steelhead first arrives in Shinjuku at the house of his relative Jie, he has already killed one man, robbed a cop, and stole a farmer’s shoes. Jie rents a one-room shack at the back of someone’s house and lives there with about ten other Chinese men and one woman. The claustrophobia of the low ceiling and crowded living room is immediately connoted in this welcome scene, anchoring the house as a queer domestic space of alternative sexual economies. It is mostly a male household; the only woman is a cook, and the new woman later introduced to the house is a bar hostess (Lily). This space becomes the headquarters of their new gang where illegal trade come and go. Rather than the domestic sanctuary of heterosexual intimacy, it is a hideout for irregular capital and desire. Improper desire

is accentuated by the initial failure of Steelhead to find Xiu Xiu, and Jie's inability to befriend a Taiwanese girl. With one losing his future wife to a Japanese man and the other losing his girlfriend because he is not Japanese, hegemonic Chinese masculinity is queered as lacking and inferior. As Steelhead and his gang prosper in their underworld business ventures, Steelhead decides to turn over a new leaf. Saving the life of a policeman (Kitano) and a yakuza boss (Eguchi), he is fast tracked to his legal residency.

Anti-hero Steelhead, like Eguchi, is both a good and a bad man, resembling the Chinese neoliberal composition of good and bad *suzhi* identified earlier. In the beginning, he stands by his chivalry and saves everyone he meets; he protects Lily from a violent client, rescues Kitano from drowning, avenges Jie who was bashed, and even saves a fellow black market laborer. Although he later becomes morally ambiguous as his criminal activities increase, his bad deeds are rationalized through loyalty and justice, even when shooting someone. As a rich triad boss, he refuses his profit share and channels it to the gentrification of the neighborhood. Likewise, Eguchi is a good father and husband, and also understands the brotherhood code, appreciating that Steelhead has saved him and in return, rewarding him with rank and legitimacy. The calm he exudes while protecting his family is also matched in the brutality of his killings. Steelhead's embodiment as a legal subject exemplifies the migrant's capital accumulation strategies: economic and social capitals ultimately also confer legal and cultural acceptance. Likewise, Eguchi is made proper by expensive suits, political connections, and the family. For both, the bad quality associated with the underworld is masked by the veneer of a good citizenry based on ethical self-cultivation. Subjectivities are re-embodied through consumption including the re-making oneself as compliant and respectable. Unlike Jie who is impetuous, takes short-cuts, and defies gang turfs, Steelhead personifies the right modes of cultivation; in particular, the self-interest and survival of the Chinese migrant in Japan.

Chinese migrants in Japan have a long history that dates back to the first modern era during the Meiji period (1896–1912). They mediated relations between Japan and China during the first Sino-Japanese war (1894–1895), as well as between Japan and the West. Their contributions, however, were mostly unacknowledged due to Japan's ideological assumptions about its own racial, political, and economic superiority. Shaped by Western orientalism, the Japanese saw Chinese migrants as “not possess(ing) the same political and economic clout, social prestige and cultural capital as Westerners” (Tsu 2010: 178). These conditions of discrimination were exacerbated during the second Sino-Japanese war (1932–1945) where 20 million Chinese died and 200 million endured Japanese Occupation. Those, including Chinese migrants in Japan, who mediated relations between the two countries, were known as collaborators. While collaboration meant working with the enemy either voluntarily or involuntarily, it was considered to be “out of self-interest or for sheer survival, but not out of ideological commitment to the enemy's cause” (Barrett 2001: 8). Self-interest and survival have continued to shape the present lives of Chinese migrants in Japan.

The film's setting and its portrayal of migrants coincide with Japan's current era of "domestic internationalization" (Graburn and Ertl 2008: 7). Since World War II, Japan has opened its borders to international trade and migration. In the last 25 years, the country has seen an influx of "newcomers" from South East Asia (especially Vietnam and the Philippines) and the Middle East. When China began its reform policy in 1985, the number of Chinese going to Japan rose exponentially. In 2009 there were 680,518 Chinese in Japan, compared to 52,896 in 1980 (Kiyomi 2011: 166). As recent migrants, the film's protagonists belong to this group, known as "Chinese newcomers." This group has been instrumental in setting up new Chinatowns across Japan. Prominent among these is the amusement center of Ikebukuro, near Shinjuku, which has a large number of low-cost apartments and Japanese-language schools. Chinese newcomers own grocery, cell phone and computer shops, and restaurants that cater not only to fellow migrants but also local communities. This type of transitional labor practice is also evident in the film: in particular, the laboring practices of the protagonists reflect their self-interest in survival.

The film's protagonists are motivated by their individual need to survive and thrive. When Lily has saved enough money to start a business, she becomes the owner of a new bar. Xiu Xiu marries Eguchi to escape hostessing despite having a fiancé in China, being subjected to the discriminated foreigner status attributed to the Chinese and the need for Chinese wives to strongly assimilate. After Jie loses his pushcart business and recovers from having his face slashed, he becomes rich as the leader of a drug ring. Even the other triad members refuse to heed Steelhead's advice and continue to expand their illegal business operations with sex bars and gambling dens. Like the makeover of Steelhead and Eguchi, these laboring practices are governed according to self-entrepreneurial neoliberal imperatives. They also re-define the action genre.

The laboring body in the action film functions as a repository for imaginings of power and stored value of capital (Willemen 2005). In this film where there are no muscle-bound bodies and action is relegated to domestic devices such as hand guns and home-made knives, labor power is more evident in the abstraction of the migrant's body than the hero's physical strength or the film's technological gadgetry. The expenditure of migrant labor exposes the politics of mobility at national and transnational levels, and reveals the migration institution as form of border control that structures different practices of inclusion and exclusion, from barriers to entry to conditions of resettlement and integration. The illegal and leaky boats that charge exorbitant rates to transport desperate people escaping for a better life (as shown in the film's television news reports) form part of the same underground transnational circuit that employs undocumented workers in the recycling and construction industries such as in those jobs occupied by Steelhead and his Chinese friends. The aspiration of all the protagonists to fit in, conform, and succeed, is tied to the legacy and continued reality of a monoracial nation that treats its minorities as invisible and with little influence in society, as well as the sending

country's inability to provide for its own, as seen from Steelhead's flashbacks to the Chinese rural countryside where poor peasants willingly submit to dangerous schemes of flight. Expended through human trafficking, informal economies, multinational conglomerates and crime syndicates, and abstracted at the individual body of capital accumulation, the politics of mobility materializes the inferior Chinese migrant in Japan trying to make good and get by. Presenting a new attempt to re-define the action genre, the film's portrayal of migrant materiality challenges the body genre (Hunt 2003) that action is also known as: "diasporic cultural production offers Chan a way of destabilizing the norms of Chinese value and heroic action culture" (Wilson 2005).

The film broadens the way Hong Kong cinema has always used Japan as a form cultural capital through casting, setting, appropriation of plots and remakes (Yeh and Davis 2002), as seen in films such as *The Tricky Master* (Wong Jing, 1999), *Tempting Heart* (Sylvia Chang, 1999), *Okinawa Rendezvous* (Gordan Chan, 2000), *Initial D* (Andrew Lau and Alan Mak, 2005), and *Moonlight in Tokyo* (Alan Mak and Felix Chong, 2005). With its multilingual representation of regional gangs from Taiwan, Fujian, Vietnam, and Shanghai, the film highlights the heterogeneous and incompatible Chinese communities in Japan that are not represented in minority Chinese ethnic media, which tend to "reinforce the same myth of China as a homogenous nation" (Chan 2006: 23) because of its nationalist role in reconstructing Chinese identity. The film also resonates with contemporary representations of the anti-hero in recent Hong Kong crime and action cinema. Like the Andy Lau character of Mongfu in *A Fighter's Blues*, dying at the end of the film is also the way Steelhead atones for his crimes. These processes of redemption, as make-over techniques of new masculine self-making, are similar to films such as *Sparrow* (Johnnie To, 2008), *Election* (Johnnie To, 2005), *Exiled* (Johnnie To, 2006), *Confession of Pain* (Andrew Lau and Alan Mak, 2006), and *Infernal Affairs* (Andrew Lau and Alan Mak, 2002), where the struggle of the anti-hero is the struggle to reform and conform.

The concept of neoliberal masculinity proposed here works with and extends the paradigm of crisis masculinity well rehearsed in the discipline of this genre (Stringer 1997; Pang and Wong 2005). The anti-hero's re-embodiment of neoliberal masculinity provides a historically-specific context to situate the rise of Chinese neoliberalism that was accelerated by the incorporation of capitalist Hong Kong into socialist China (Ren 2010). The shift of the sovereignty of the people into the individual body of the citizen has resulted in the normalization of entrepreneurial citizenship and new ideologies of sacrifice and responsibility that champion not only the self but consumer projects for the development of the body and soul. These global, social, and cultural forces have transformed and made flexible new practices of masculinity. Like crisis masculinity that has a tendency to equate the vulnerability of political legitimacy to a threatened masculinity, neoliberal masculinity responds to the crisis that has surfaced in the intersections of these forces. The cinema's new anti-heroes have emerged as exemplary figures of this condition.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to provide a new critical lens to read the intersections of gender and the diaspora in Hong Kong cinema from the 1990s and 2000s. Using a survey of two groups of film set in the Chinese diasporas in the West and the mainland diaspora in Hong Kong, the framework of queer domesticity has been introduced to consider how migrant home-spaces are regulated through practices of re-embodiment to suit the neoliberal imperatives of the economies in China, Hong Kong SAR, and the West. In these economies, I have showed how queer domesticity, as a site of alternative sexualities, is contained by a politics of mobility that shapes the practices of migrant capital accumulation, assimilation, and settlement. These practices reveal the conservative “right” qualities of embodiment hailed by the new heteronormative and homonormative desires of sex, family, and consumption. This framework is also further demonstrated in the star persona of Jackie Chan and his role in the gangster thriller, *Shinjuku Incident*. I have shown how the film redefined the action genre through its focus on migrant materiality that challenged normative representations of Chinese communities in Japan and Japan in Hong Kong film. Key to the new action genre is the rise of neoliberal masculinity as a site for questioning the current regimes of regulation.

By focusing on the concept of “regulation” in this chapter, I hope to show how the concept is central to the diaspora as a site of regulated mobility and subjectivity. The discourse of regulation relates directly to Hong Kong as it experiences the effects of re-nationalism; for Hong Kong migrants living outside of Hong Kong, it too affects everyday life and world-making practices. Relating to the broader tenet of “policy,” “regulation” is also a productive site to consider how policy should not only be consigned to the narrow realm of film policy studies but can also be incorporated in the growing discipline of Hong Kong cultural and cinema studies.

Notes

- 1 This approach to the diaspora and gender extends existing scholarship focusing on practices of migrant incorporation (from the perspectives of resistance or hybridity) or domestic queer kinship (from the perspective of resistance to heteronormativity, e.g., Leung 2008).
- 2 Although the hegemonic discourse of *suzhi* is predominantly associated with mainland China, one of its genealogies can be traced to the Confucian roots of physical, spiritual, moral, and intellectual training (Kipnis 2006). This deployment of Confucian cultivation is invoked here to discuss its impact on Hong Kong, in particular, its influence in the class hierarchy of the local gay scene (Kong 2010).
- 3 Residentialism, a prominent nineteenth century ideology of agrarianism, describes a mode of social organization to refer to “groups of persons as static, self-sufficient group

- of settlers who enjoy equal rights of permanent residence,” and classifies migrants “as persons with a deviant behaviour” and accords them a lower social status (Kleinschmidt 2003: 10).
- 4 Marchetti (2006: 31–62) discusses how consumption practices in this film are tied to historical legacies that differentiate Hong Kong and mainland identities.
 - 5 On how neoliberalism has affected Hong Kong women, see also Marchetti (2009).

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Commentary

To Love is to Demand: A Very Short Commentary

Shu-mei Shih

This section on “The Gendered Body and Queer Configurations” is notable for its attention to Hong Kong cinema as a diverse and rich collection of films that are struggling to articulate a new identity in the context of the already-shifted political economy of culture between China and Hong Kong. Whereas Hong Kong cinema had boomed despite a climate of ultra commercialism and the impending retrocession to China before 1997, it is now increasingly aware of its impending doom where fewer and fewer films are made in Hong Kong, more and more films are co-productions, and art house or locally oriented films are considered to be too parochial. Instead of “doom and boom” (the impending doom of 1997 paradoxically saw the glorious booming of Hong Kong culture), as Ackbar Abbas once aptly described, it seems to be truly entering into an era of doom. Instead of the historical moment being pegged at 1997, prior to which Hong Kong cultural workers had taken a retrospective glance and attended to Hong Kong lovingly (Abbas coined the term “Love at Last Sight” in this case), today we must call upon the moral courage of critics and audiences alike to love a “fallen cinema” (Helen Leung’s term here) at the brink of disappearance. “Disappearance” is no longer an enabling paradox, as in Abbas, but a literal description. If we could not help but love Hong Kong cinema in the 1980s and 1990s, now love may have to be an appeal or a demand in order to keep Hong Kong cinema as we know it going.

The “China factor,” so to speak, is the big elephant in the room. It increasingly dictates all aspects of production, including language-choice, market selection, funding, setting, plot, character relationships, and depictions of sexuality, etc. Be it neoliberal citizenship and masculinity in the diaspora that subsumes queer sociality (Audrey Yue, Chapter 12), cosmopolitan feminism with an encyclopedic inclusiveness of all manners of women’s issues in the work of veteran filmmaker Ann Hui (Gina Marchetti, Chapter 10), or the insistent attention to local history and culture in some of the recent films (Helen Leung, Chapter 11), the “ur-sign” of “China” is everywhere, more palpable and more physical.

The future of Hong Kong cinema appears to hinge on this master sign, where, the sign will be realized as the label, under which Hong Kong cinema may eventually be subsumed. We all know that the China label is highly marketable in the

global context. At the same time, the rising China will increasingly take on its role as a new agent who bestows and withholds recognition. Within this emergent politics of recognition, Hong Kong cinema may paradoxically be re-centered by becoming Chinese. Whether as a marketable label or as the agent of recognition, “China” may already be inextricably tied to financial reward and global recognition of Hong Kong cinema.

As I see it, there are several scenarios for the future of Hong Kong cinema: 1) it will gradually become integrated into Chinese cinema and it will no longer have a distinct identity; 2) it will somehow maintain its identity even in the context of co-productions and mainlandization; 3) it will insist on maintaining its identity by the sheer effort of love. To cultivate Hong Kong cinema in the second and third scenarios will require love, lots of it. Loving Hong Kong cinema therefore has now become a demand, lest the incredible creativity and inventiveness of this cinema falls into a fate similar to that of Vancouver, where Hong Kong cinema becomes “a service provider for the needs of a far more powerful cinema across the border” (Helen Leung).

Part IV

Hong Kong Stars

Return of the Dragon

Handover, Hong Kong Cinema, and Chinese Ethno-nationalism

Paul Bowman

Introduction: Hong Kong's Velvet Prison

Writing in the early 1990s about Chinese films, Rey Chow reflects on the various ways in which Chinese nationalism arises within film. Even in the work of directors whose films can be regarded (via the effort of interpretation) as being more or less critical of past and present Chinese politics and of Maoism in particular, through their films of the 1980s and 90s, Chow notes the ways that these films still involve a species of nationalism that may see itself as antithetical, oppositional, or critical of state messages and propaganda, but that is actually always a version of the same “essentialist” discourse (Chow 1995: 4–53). This discourse is “essentialist” in that it proposes an essence of the “true China,” conceived as something that is always beyond representation. Of course, Chow is keen to point out the ways in which this idea of the essence is always culturally constructed. In showing this, perhaps her most devastating proposal is that it is not impossible to see evidence of the extent to which the very Chinese filmmakers and intellectuals who might most easily be viewed as critical or even oppositional are in actual fact complicit with official Chinese state discourse (Chow 1995: 50–51). The proposal of this chapter is that a version of this same “complicity” arose within Hong Kong film around but especially in the aftermath of the 1997 handover of Hong Kong from British crown colony status to China.

This complicity is not univocal, not simple, and is not to be denounced simplistically. It emerges for complicated reasons. Chinese nationalism has a long and complex history. *Diasporic* Chinese “nationalism” is perhaps even more complicated – and

there has long been an element of “diasporic” or “isolated” – “separated” – sentimentality within even Hong Kong ethnic Chinese nationalism. So, the films that I read in this chapter negotiate the grafting of “two cultures” – indeed, to use a loaded term, “two systems” – “two” putative entities that have long shared an affective discourse of *unjust* separation: Hong Kong is rendered in this discourse as a part of Chinese *land* unjustly or painfully taken, with Hong Kongers regarded as part of the same ethno-nationalist “family” (albeit “corrupted” by capitalism). The tear and the graft, the border and the join – as Derrida might have put it, the *disjointure* – between the Hong Kong peninsula and islands and mainland China is accordingly the exemplary site of the antagonism that structures a powerful discourse. Chow delineates the key ingredients of this discourse:

A strong sense of primordial, rural rootedness thus goes hand in hand with an equally compelling conviction of China’s primariness, of China’s potential primacy as a modern nation with a glorious civilization. This paradox of a *primitivism that sees China as simultaneously victim and empire* is what leads modern Chinese intellectuals to their so-called obsession with China. (Chow 1995: 23)

It is this affective attachment and emotional investment in the idea of China, of a former wholeness and a potential future greatness that is shared, albeit differently, by the main versions of Chinese nationalism: imperialist nationalism, diasporic nationalism and, argues Chow, even the “critical” nationalism of high art, the Fifth Generation filmmakers. For what all share is a sense of nostalgia for a time before the break (whether that break be Maoism or the loss of Hong Kong to the British), and a fantasy about reparation.

Unfortunately, according to Chow, this has led to what Hungarian dissident poet Miklos Haraszti calls the “velvet prison.” To explain what this is, Chow gives Geremie Barmé’s characterization of this complex situation of self-censorship and complicity between even “critical” artists and intellectuals and state doctrine and discourse:

A realm in which the crude and military style of Stalinist (or Maoist) rule with its attendant purges, denunciations, and struggles has finally given way (or is giving way, as is the case in China) to a new dawn of “soft,” civilian government. Technocrats reformulate the social contract, one in which consensus replaces coercion, and complicity subverts criticism. Censorship is no longer the job of a ham-fisted *apparat*, but a partnership involving artists, audiences, and commissars alike. This is “progressive censorship,” and it has an aesthetic all of its own. The new dispensation is described in various ways: the Czech dissident Vaclav Havel speaks of it as “invisible violence,” while Haraszti has dubbed it “the velvet prison.” And it is a prison with an aesthetic all of its own; (self-) repression itself has become a form of high art (Barmé, quoted in Chow 1995: 50–51).

It is with the emergence or resurgence of this troubling form of nationalistic complicity in Hong Kong film – whether regarded as “coming across the border” with

the Chinese state post-1997, as emerging within Hong Kong film as a kind of response to the changed situation – that this chapter is concerned. It does not look at high art; it looks at very lowbrow, very sentimental film – in order to show that nationalism-serving “primitive passions” emerge as spontaneous ideologies in many realms of cinematic culture. It argues that this recently took place within Hong Kong cinema in response to the new conditions of a post-1997 relationship with(in) “China” by way of a re-deployment – an ideological re-appropriation and re-signification – of the 1970s superstar, Bruce Lee.

Bruce Lee Then and Now

By all accounts, in the 1970s, Bruce Lee was the very symbol of postcolonial, diasporic multicultural energy (Miller 2000; Prashad 2001; Kato 2007); the embodiment of what Rey Chow has called “the protestant ethnic” (Chow 2002; Nitta 2010). However, in the book *From Tiananmen to Times Square: Transnational China and the Chinese Diaspora on Global Screens, 1989–1997* (Marchetti 2006), Gina Marchetti considers the waning of the affect of the socio-political charge of the image and politics of Bruce Lee in America. That is: although in the 1970s, Bruce Lee was this symbol of postcolonial, diasporic, multicultural “protestant ethnicity,” by the 1990s, the passions and problematics associated with diasporic Asian ethnicity had changed in status, form, and content somewhat.

In fact, argues Marchetti, in the 1990s Hollywood films which sought to replay and canonize Bruce Lee’s energies – specifically 1992’s knowingly intertextual *Rapid Fire* (Dwight H. Little) (starring Bruce Lee’s son, Brandon), and 1993’s biopic, *Dragon: The Bruce Lee Story* (Rob Cohen) – the spirit of protest and radicality associated with Bruce Lee seems to have not only ossified and wizened but also to have actually atrophied and regressed away from politicized protest against social injustice and to have collapsed into little more than juvenile Oedipal anger. In other words, Marchetti suggests, in America, in Hollywood, in the West, Bruce Lee (and everything for which he may once have stood) has had his day: the biopic *Dragon* situates Hollywood’s racism firmly in the past, writing it as something that Bruce Lee “broke through” and “overcame”; and *Rapid Fire*, which constructs Brandon as Bruce Lee’s contemporary “heir,” fails to articulate a single coherent social, cultural, political, or ideological “problem” or “issue” against which to protest. In true Hollywood style, *Rapid Fire* absorbs the potentially-political into the familiarly Oedipal. And the problem with the oedipal is that it is such a strongly repetitive structure, one that is ultimately organized by reconciliation rather than radical transformation. So, taken as an heir to Bruce Lee’s cultural legacies, *Rapid Fire* is something of a disappointment.

Perhaps this should come as no surprise. After all, *Rapid Fire* is ultimately little more than an easy-viewing, formulaic low-budget action flick. Perhaps it should

not be expected to shoulder the “non-white-man’s burden,” or be taken to exemplify anything more profound about culture and society than the fact that it is not really a very good film. But at the same time, we must remember: *Bruce Lee films too* are, by the same token, or by any conventional measure, not really very good films either! *And yet*, Bruce Lee films are so much more than so many other generically or formally similar films.

What is this “so much more”? A claim of “something more” ought not to be heard as a claim that Bruce Lee films themselves *aren’t* Oedipal, formulaic, or simplistic. They are indeed. There is much that is irreducibly juvenile about them – and about very many – perhaps the majority of – martial arts films. And I say this in full awareness of the likelihood I might be accused of “orientalism” or even “racism” – as if by pointing out the silliness and childishness of many martial arts films I am thereby reducing the Asian Other to a state of simplicity, childishness, innocence, or even savagery. But, really: I’m not being racist or ethnocentric. My prejudice is directed rather towards action film genres, formulas, and narratives as such. It is these that are Oedipal and simplistic, and not some hypothesized (essentialized) and supposedly “pure” and “purely other” ethnic subject or somehow simply “non-Western” film industry. (We ought to know enough about the international traffic in ideas, techniques, technologies, and discourses to avoid this kind of thinking.) So, to clarify: it is because of the codes and formulas of action cinema that both Bruce Lee films and Brandon Lee films as well as many other martial arts and action films besides might be regarded as essentially “shabby.” *But* the important point is that *despite* all of this – and *shining through* all of this – Bruce Lee films contained or encoded in condensed and displaced form several interlocking socio-political antagonisms: antagonisms of class and ethnicity, of coloniality and exploitation, of marginality and hegemony, center and periphery, and, crucially perhaps, nation and belonging, or nation and longing. It is the destiny of some of these discourses that I want to consider in what follows.

Bruce Lee Here and There

The story of Lee’s explosion onto cinema screens all over the world, to a truly unprecedented extent, is well known (Miller 2000; Hunt 2003). Similarly, the story of his image’s role in the forging of interethnic identifications, multicultural hybridizations, and anti-racist and civil rights energies has been quite widely documented too (Brown 1997; Prashad 2001; Chong 2012). But that was then, and, according to Marchetti, as the eviscerated and gestural (non-)politics of films like Brandon Lee’s *Rapid Fire* demonstrate, by the 1990s, Bruce Lee was no longer quite what once he had been. This is because the cultural political landscape had moved on or settled down to such an extent that Bruce Lee no longer performed the same social and semiotic cultural functions, or fed the same fire – as the symbol

of not only the outsider and underdog, but also the migrant, the worker, the exploited, the colonized, the oppressed, the victim of racism, the protesting ethnic, and of course (as everyone knows who knows anything about Bruce Lee's martial arts), the interdisciplinary postmodernist multiculturalist innovator and radicalizer of martial arts in the West (Bowman 2010). By the 1990s, Bruce Lee was well and truly a familiar part of Western culture (an *institution*), and no longer part of Western cultural politics (as a metaphor or symbol of disruptive "outside" force).

At the same time, the story of Bruce Lee's relation to first Hong Kong and subsequently to Chinese culture and politics is something different. In saying this, I mean Chinese in the sense of the nation state rather than Chinese in the sense of ethnic Chinese. Bruce Lee as ethnic Chinese – and indeed Hong Kong culture as strongly ethnically Chinese – is one set of matters. But Bruce Lee (and, as we will see, Hong Kong) vis-à-vis or *within* the geopolitical entity and borders of China itself is another. And again, as very many theorists and analysts of culture have observed, Hong Kong itself has always had a complex double and also paradoxically vanishing status; functioning both as a complex node and articulator of so-called East and so-called West whilst also, to borrow the phrase of Ackbar Abbas, functioning perversely and paradoxically in a mode of disappearance (Abbas 1997). For, insofar as Hong Kong has long been simultaneously constructed as "other" of (or other than) both China and Britain (and by extension, the rest of Asia, Eurasia, Europe, and America), Hong Kong has always been problematically liminal (Chow 1998). To recall the Mafioso formula that is revealed to be spurious in the film *Old Boy* (namely, "my enemy's enemy is my friend"), we might observe that, as other of East and other of West, the Other of my Other is in no way guaranteed to be my "same." The enemy of my enemy is not necessarily my friend; the Other of my Other is not necessarily my same. And this, as so many thinkers have pointed out, is the situation of Hong Kong vis-à-vis China and the West and the rest.

This is why, even if Bruce Lee immediately constituted a clear semiotic paradigm of "China" and of "Chineseness" in the West, he never (simply) did in China or Hong Kong, despite his films' overwhelming box office success all over Asia. Furthermore, various commentators have noted that even though Bruce Lee choreographies had an immediate, dramatic, and lasting effect on Western film choreographies, the immediate effects of Bruce Lee films on the Hong Kong film industry were either slight or difficult to perceive at all, for quite some time (Tan, quoted in Miller 2000: 156). Indeed, we might also observe, even today, despite the prominent and popular statue of Bruce Lee on Hong Kong's Kowloon waterfront (or his waxwork outside the Madame Tussauds' waxwork museum that takes its place among the complex of restaurants and shops at the top of Hong Kong's other primary tourist destination, the viewing area at Victoria Peak), there is actually astonishingly little in the way of a Bruce Lee tourist or cultural industry in Hong Kong. It seems very much as if, in Hong Kong, Bruce Lee is regarded as something trivial for some tourists – or even, as if Bruce Lee is regarded by Hong Kongers as being about as much a Hong Konger as Hong Kong Disneyland.

Bruce Lee, Local Foreigner

Nevertheless, Bruce Lee is there; and perhaps not unlike Disneyland, Bruce Lee is once again moving from the liminal to the center. But this time, Bruce Lee is performing a very different kind of decentering and recentering work. For, more recently, Bruce Lee has been deliberately and unequivocally picked up and deployed ideologically by mainstream arms of the Chinese state in a number of different ways. Most notable perhaps is the way that in the run up to the Beijing Olympics, Chinese TV initiated a major, and now extremely long-running, TV series about the life of this uniquely Sino-American superstar.

The ideological dimension and motivation of the Chinese state appropriation and recasting of Bruce Lee (as one of China's beloved prodigal sons) perhaps goes without saying. It is a moment in a process that can be linked to the Chinese state's growing inclination to open its borders to filmmakers, on the tacit proviso (so it seems) that China "itself" be depicted as visually stunning and geopolitically coherent. John Eperjesi (Eperjesi 2004) has called this a new form of "cultural diplomacy" – the rebranding and marketing of "China itself," via the landscape, as a kind of "other Eden." According to Eperjesi, the "cultural diplomacy" of the invention of a newly visualized or visualizable China was the successor to "ping-pong diplomacy." Chinese cultural diplomacy – the re-presenting (the re-branding) of China by way of the deployment of its landscapes as visually stunning – can be marked out on a line that runs at least from *The Last Emperor* (Bertolucci, 1987) to *Crouching Tiger* (Ang Lee, 2000) to *Hero* (Zhang Yimou, 2002) to *House of Flying Daggers* (Zhang Yimou, 2004) and on, I would add, to the recent remake of *The Karate Kid* (Harald Zwart, 2010) – a film which depicts China in a way that could not easily have been touched-up further had it been conceived by a state apparatus in charge of boosting tourism. (Admittedly, the film is not orientalist through and through, but the major whack of orientalism we are given in the protagonists' pilgrimage to a hyperreal Taoist monastery in a hyperreal version of the already hyperreal tourist and HSBC-advert destination of Guilin is second to none.)

So Bruce Lee is being redeployed in this straightforwardly ideological rebranding of the public image of China. And this is hardly surprising. But at the same time, Bruce Lee is being rather differently reworked by the Hong Kong film industry too, and on a different sort of level.

Bruce Lee's Return to/of Hong Kong

Much was written about Hong Kong identity in the run up to the 1997 handover of Hong Kong from British rule to Chinese rule. Much of this focused on the understandable anxieties that arose in the face of the prospect of the ultra-capitalist "Pearl

of the Orient” being handed over to the last communist superpower on Earth. If the self-writing of Hong Kong in the run up to 1997 was characterized by anxiety, then the situation of the next few years was perhaps a little like the way we all felt when, filled with fear and trepidation, and holding our breath or crossing our fingers, we all tentatively turned on our computers in the morning or afternoon of the New Year’s (and new millennium’s) Day of 1 January 2000. Was the computer going to work? Would the “Millennium Bug” have destroyed it? Was the sky going to fall on our heads? Press the button... So far so good... It seems to be working like normal... Phew!

After a decade of Hong Kong cautiously exhaling, nervously relaxing and feeling around for signs of pain or injury, some who had left before 1997 started to return. These included a strangely familiar figure, behind a rather flimsy disguise. It was of course Bruce Lee, but not exactly. For this time, Bruce Lee was not *actually* Bruce Lee. Nor did he take the form of a character originating in Hong Kong (or even the *mainland* China of the Hong Kong peninsula) and travelling to and from America, or to and from Italy or to and from mysterious Fu Manchu-esque island fortresses. This time Bruce Lee was always not only a mainlander but a Chinese subject and a fervent patriot, travelling to and from the mainland and Hong Kong, the mainland and Europe. In this return, sometimes Bruce Lee was Ip Man – a mythologized version of Bruce Lee’s real *sifu* (or *sigong*), the teacher (or, more correctly, Lee’s teachers’ teacher). At other times Bruce Lee was Chen Zhen – the Chinese nationalist of popular fantasy immortalized by Bruce Lee in *Fist of Fury* (Lo Wei, 1972). Virtually every time, “Bruce Lee” was played by Donnie Yen. And each time, the return of the spirit of Bruce Lee saw also the rather surprising reciprocal return of Japan, playing the role of the terrible imperial enemy.

All of these films are haunted by Bruce Lee. They are *structured* by Bruce Lee, who operates as what film theorists used to call an “absent presence” (or a “present absence”). They are induced by Bruce Lee. The first *Ip Man* film came out in 2008, starring Donnie Yen. This film was both in something of a race with another nominally similar film, and in a squabble about the title; because Wong Kar-wai was at the same time also developing a film focusing on the character of Ip Man. However, the latter’s film became mired in production problems and was not to appear until 2013 – it being, of course, *The Grandmaster* (Wong Kar-wai, 2013). The point to note is that there could have been both an *Ip Man* and another film about Ip Man appearing in the same year. *The Legend is Born: Ip Man* (Wilson Yip, 2008) and *Ip Man 2* (Wilson Yip, 2010) both appeared in 2010; the former focusing on the early life of Ip Man; the latter on his later life. In the same year, *Legend of the Fist: The Return of Chen Zhen* (Lau Wai-keung, 2010) also came out. In this film, the Chen Zhen who was apparently shot and killed at the end of Bruce Lee’s 1972 *Fist of Fury* turns out not to have died after all, but to have gone into hiding and to have gone off to fight along with other Chinese in subservient role in the trenches and front lines of World War I in France. This time Chen Zhen returns to Shanghai and becomes a semi-superhero crime-fighter, bizarrely wearing the Kato mask and

uniform that Bruce Lee's character (Kato) wore on the US TV show *The Green Hornet* (William Dozier, 1966–7). Most recently, Herman Yau's film *Ip Man: the Final Fight* appeared in 2013, starring Anthony Wong Chau-sang.

If most of these "returns" star Donnie Yen, this is more than a good couple of years' work for Donnie Yen. What is more significant is the extent to which all of the characters and all of the films are irreducibly entangled with, indebted to, constituted by, and structured through Bruce Lee, in condensed and displaced form. The question is why, or what this might be signifying or doing.

In the first *Ip Man* film, Bruce Lee is not literally present until the end. And when I say "literally" I mean literally: in words: for it is only at the very end of the film, after Ip Man has defeated the Japanese martial arts expert general, publicly and decisively, and then been shot and had to flee, that words appear on the screen to tell us that Ip Man fled to Hong Kong whereupon he returned to martial arts teaching, training thousands of students including (drum roll, dramatic pause) Bruce Lee. End of film. Of course, this means that all of this Ip Man stuff was but a prelude or subplot to the real news, the real story: Bruce Lee – with Ip Man standing to Lee as a kind of John the Baptist to Jesus.

As such, Bruce Lee has been presiding over the film, for quite some time – from *before* the beginning. For, from the outset – from *before* the outset – as you all now know we will come to learn in the big reveal about Bruce Lee at the very end, those in the know will already have known that the single, solitary reason why *anyone* outside of Hong Kong knows *anything* at all about Ip Man is *exclusively* because of the international filmic success of Bruce Lee. This filmic success led to the popularity of the martial art that Bruce Lee studied as a teenager – *wing chun*. And (it is important to note) it is not the other way around: The post-Bruce Lee popularity of *wing chun* was regarded with no little dismay by Western martial arts scholars and historians such as Don Draeger and Robert Smith (Smith 1999), who could not comprehend the new power of cinema and celebrity to transform the status of one minor Chinese martial arts style among many derived from Shaolin White Crane into something internationally regarded as a definitive or superior fighting art. Many Hong Kong and Chinese martial arts traditionalists do not even regard *wing chun* as a "proper" martial art at all – because, for one thing, it is not old enough, and for another, again, its popularity derives from Bruce Lee movies.

Without wishing to disparage *wing chun* at all, it nevertheless seems fair to say that such historians as Smith and Draeger had a point, even if they vented their spleen about Bruce Lee and *wing chun* rather than about the formidable power of the cinematic apparatus over cultural practices, cultural memory and the cultural writing and rewriting of history and mythology. For, as we see clearly through films like *Ip Man*, history can be dramatically reconstituted. The cart very often gets put before the horse. For what is asserted by the film, which rewrites Ip Man's life, is that Ip Man ought to be remembered as a patriotic Chinese hero, rather than a martial arts instructor, one of whose student's students happened to become immensely famous. The film also proposes that Ip Man *only* chooses to leave

China for Hong Kong in order to escape *Japanese* occupation and persecution. None of this is strictly speaking the case.

Now, I do not want to undertake a process of nit-picking about the factual correctness or fictional fabulousness of any of these films. Nevertheless, one crucial historical detail deserves note. The real Ip Man left China to escape not the Japanese during the Sino-Japanese War, but rather to escape the new Communist regime of mainland China. Yet, in all of these films, it is overwhelmingly Japan that is used to play the evil empire. Communist China is thereby screened off, concealed from view, and hence from comment of any kind. Lacanians might call this foreclosure. It is certainly a different sort of structuring absence or absent presence to the traces of Bruce Lee that are perceptible within the fabric of the film texts themselves. But Bruce Lee is still its bearer. This can be seen in the recurrence of what I will call the Dojo Fight Scene.

The Eternal Return of the Dojo

In 1972's *Fist of Fury*, the Chinese Jing Wu *kung fu kwoon* in the Japanese controlled zone of the international settlement in Shanghai in the early 1900s is targeted by a Japanese martial arts institution. As it turns out, the Chinese master, Huo Yuanjia, has been poisoned by Japanese impostors working as cooks in the Chinese school. This is evidently because the Chinese master is so skilful a martial artist that the Japanese felt threatened. As befits the basic aesthetic of celluloid treachery, the leader of the Japanese martial artists sends a delegation to Huo Yuanjia's funeral, bearing the offensive gift of a framed scroll which reads "*dong ya bing fu* (東亞病夫)": "Sick Man of Asia." This is of course at least doubly offensive: for not only did the Japanese poison the Chinese man because of his superior martial skill, but also because, since the onset of European colonialism and Japanese imperialism (not to mention the British-induced introduction of large scale opium use in China), the characterization of China itself as the sick "man" of Asia had grown into a common stereotype – perhaps at its peak in the colonial period of the film's setting, but no less current during the era of the film's release. So the slur works excellently on several levels, having several interlocking levels of offensiveness: national geopolitical weakness, corruption of the body politic, masculine weakness, and drug-addled weakness being the key coordinates. In this film it has the added twist of being uttered by the very people who have poisoned and weakened both the Chinese man and the Chinese nation itself. So we can see, straight away, when Bruce Lee returns the spiteful and twisted letter to its sender in the form of his visit to the Japanese dojo and his defeat of every single one of the students and teachers there, why this scene of dramatic retribution would have a very strong – overdetermined – affective charge.

The choreography here – as in all Bruce Lee fight scenes – is magnificent. Second to none, I would argue, even to this day. But the power, memorability, and

intense emotional and affective charge of the scene would not have been so strong were it not that it comes in response to the “Sick Man of Asia” provocation, which, as just mentioned, activates decades upon decades of national and diasporic ethnic Chinese hurt. (Moreover, the catharsis provided by Bruce Lee’s victory for many viewers is evidently been matched, in Japan, by a kind of cultural repudiation, disavowal, or repression. For, despite its immense global success, *Fist of Fury* has never been screened on terrestrial Japanese television.¹)

This overdetermination is doubtless why the scene returns so frequently in Hong Kong martial arts film. It is so good, in fact, that it returns even within *Fist of Fury* itself. In the first dojo fight scene, at the start, in response to the stinging cultural insult, Lee humiliates and hurts the Japanese martial artists. But in his subsequent return, after he has learnt the full extent of the Japanese institution’s murderousness, he pulls no punches, takes no prisoners, and kills everyone who stands in his way. The scene returns again in Jet Li’s *Fist of Legend* (Gordon Chan, 1994), unsurprisingly, as this is a direct remake of the Bruce Lee film. And it also returns – as a return – in *Legend of the Fist: The Return of Chen Zhen*, with Chen Zhen returning, after his return as if from the grave, to fight the son and heir of the Japanese master he killed the first time around.

This latter scene is not so powerful or memorable because the affective provocation is less “condensed” or “efficient” in *Legend of the Fist* than in *Fist of Fury*, at the same time as the choreography is not up to par either. This iteration is a shadow of its former self – an echo; more like a dream sequence. Within *Legend of the Fist*, Chen Zhen has had various “flashbacks” to his first fights there in the dojo (actually, the flashbacks are to Jet Li’s Chen Zhen in *Fist of Legend*: this is because *Legend of the Fist* was directed by the same person as the Jet Li film),² and in this scene we are reminded of his reasons for showing no mercy to his opponents in a flashback run-through of every one of his friends who have been killed by the Japanese. Meanwhile the hordes of Japanese *karateka* bumble towards him with *bokken* held clumsily in the air rather than battering him down, either through skill or through the sheer weight of numbers and the extended reach that a wooden training sword would afford anyone. Moreover, it is only in this final fight scene that Donnie Yen is directed to try to imitate Bruce Lee “fully”; and this is a pity. For despite Yen’s own magnificence, his attempts to execute Bruce Lee “catcalls” and Bruce Lee gestures and postures seem half-hearted, tagged on, and in any case unconvincing – indeed, they ultimately merely remind us that Bruce Lee is not actually here and we are being subjected to a cover version performed by a tribute act.

However, in the first *Ip Man* film (not the subsequent prequel or *The Final Fight*), this specter of Bruce Lee retains or regains something of its 1972 power. One reason for this is surely that, being ostensibly about Ip Man and putatively *not* about Bruce Lee, no actor has to try to imitate the inimitable and fail to measure up. This enables the film to combine the same “affective” ingredients into the build-up to the dojo scene. Thus, the film gives us: an awful social situation of Japanese occupation, suspicions of Japanese iniquity, and the grotesquely unjust murder of an

honorable Chinese martial artist. Thus it is with some palpable, visceral, and readily intelligible rage, that Donnie Yen's Ip Man enters another Japanese dojo, and the camera slides up and back to resume the angle and viewing position it has preferred throughout many of the earlier versions of this set-piece – offset and up and back at an angle of around 30 degrees. Close in for the close up of the clenching of the fist of fury; up and back and away for the bird's eye view of the fighting.

The Return to/of China

Thus, the connections I am making between Bruce Lee and these later films is based on the identifications produced by the viewing position constructed by the camera, first of all, as much as the formal features, tokens and traces of the scenes being viewed. The camera behaves in the same sorts of ways, producing the same sorts of views (or “visibilities”) and effects. And of course, this is not culturally specific. Many films use these angles and these set ups. But switching focus from the question of what is viewed to what enables the viewing and constructs the field of visibility and, by extension, intelligibility can be, shall we say, illuminating.

In the case of this post-1997 wave of Hong Kong martial arts films, the legacies of Bruce Lee, in spectral and condensed and displaced forms, are again becoming apparent. And although films are essentially only ever really “about” films, I think that it is nevertheless clear that this wave signals a particular moment in Hong Kong's self-writing. In it, Hong Kong has been redrawn – less as the “inter-zone” that it once was (an unclear space of neither/nor and/or both/and) and more the *supplement*, the graft, the transplant, the prosthesis and opening of China. The *actual* recent history of the geopolitical entity of China is ignored. Time is frozen in either the tensions and animosities of the Sino-Japanese war or of the Hong Kong's pre-1997 “crown colony” status vis-à-vis Britain. Japan is viewed as scourge and menace; Britain with some palpable nostalgia and affection; China with love and pride.

As theorists of Hong Kong and postcoloniality have pointed out, nostalgic patriotic longing for an absent motherland is one thing: it allows one to romanticize. Facing the prospect of getting what one claimed to have wished for is quite another. In becoming Chinese, Hong Kong around 1997 needed to try to reconcile the capitalist and the communist ideologies it now straddled. At the same time, the stakes of criticizing China became higher. This is surely why China only functions as the *land*, the *family*, the *values*, and the *folk*. The evil militarized empire that drives people away from the beloved land and community is played by Japan. Driven away from home by the military tyranny, China's finest and most noble are embodied in the purity projected onto Ip Man and Chen Zhen, in a mythic rewriting of history.

Ip Man is a (or the) figure of History here. Chen Zhen is a (or the) figure of Myth. Bruce Lee is the constitutive element uniting both of these figures – absent, but implied. Were it not for Bruce Lee, neither would be gracing our screens in this

moment. Neither would be being used in Hong Kong films. Thus, in these films, we are witnessing one way that contemporary Hong Kong film engages-with *without* engaging-with-*directly* and talks-about without talking-about-*explicitly*, the potentially fraught cultural grafting and relation of reciprocal supplementarity that now exists between China and Hong Kong. The unspoken or unspeakable element (or “elephant in the room”) of Communist China is displaced onto Japan; and Ip Man and the return of Chen Zhen are the “re”-patriation of Bruce Lee, a “re”-patriation (for the first time) that is intimately intertwined with the repatriation (as if for the first time) of Hong Kong, rewriting itself, cinematically.

Coda

Through 2011 and into 2012, the numbers of tourists travelling from mainland China to Hong Kong averaged around 3,000,000 per month. This clearly demonstrates the popularity of Hong Kong among mainlanders, and could be taken as a herald of a happy future of smooth reunification. Unfortunately, however, the cinematic rewriting of Hong Kong as intimately or smoothly or necessarily and uncomplicatedly connected with the nation of China amounts to a utopian hope. There are palpable cultural differences between Hong Kongers and mainlanders, and three million mainland tourists a month cannot but “change” the Hong Kong culture, even if the Sino-British handover agreement stated that China would leave Hong Kong culture untouched for fifty years.

More than one incident has recently flared up, for instance, around the eating of food on the Hong Kong train network – a network that Hong Kongers have long prided themselves on for its cleanliness. Eating on the MTR was never tolerated; and when mainland Chinese tourists began to do so more and more, this outraged Hong Kongers to such an extent that it became the very symbol of the difference between Hong Kongers and mainlanders. Today, the number of Hong Kong residents who identify themselves with China or count themselves as being Chinese is the lowest it has ever been. Websites like YouTube contain more and more Hong Kong made films of Chinese tourists behaving in ways that the Hong Kongers regard as offensive and intolerable, and blogs, journals, and websites increasingly portray China and Chinese tourists as locusts – that is, as swarming into Hong Kong and devouring and devastating whatever they can consume. Reciprocally, at least one Chinese university professor has appeared on Chinese television and called Hong Kongers “bastards,” “dogs,” “thieves,” “running dogs of the British,” and so on, without much in the way of condemnation from other voices.

In short, there is a *cultural antagonism* – the cultural antagonism that has long been perceptible, palpable, and with various forms of discursive presence, depending on context, time, and position; albeit mainly modulations of a specifically Chinese nostalgia (for something which never existed), in the form of a discourse

of China as victim and empire (Chow 1995). Because of the history that the films try to gloss over, the future is certainly not set – at least not in the ways that the films would like to imagine, not in the mode of homecoming and return. The idea of a *cultural essence* shared among all “Chinese” can only do a finite amount to stabilize the antagonism of actual, ingrained, historically constituted cultural difference within, among, and across different and internally or mutually antagonistic groups, cultures, and contexts of “Chinese.”

Of course, antagonisms are never permanent, and history moves in ways that are not always recorded in ways that register in the pulse of daily life. Soon, the relations between Hong Kong and China will change, and in ways that may obfuscate, complicate, and even diminish any recent sense of recent or current mainland and Hong Konger difference. This is perhaps registered in film too. The recent *Ip Man: The Final Fight* (Herman Yau, 2013), for instance, does not obviously allegorize the trinity Ip Man–Hong Kong–China. Rather, it aims for a kind of “realism” in its downbeat representation of Ip Man as a mortal being, like the rest of us, combined with a clear nostalgia for Hong Kong of the 1940s and 50s. Bruce Lee appears briefly, as a hotshot ex-student, but Ip Man is unmoved by his former student’s television and film success. This emphasizes features such as Ip Man’s modesty and the domestic day-to-day focus of his life.

Indeed, the difference between the “real man” and the “public image” is arguably the major “theme” that *Ip Man: The Final Fight* explores. The film is considerably less (allegorically) “about” something to do with “China” than it is a (psychological) biography organized by exploring the difference between the myth and the man. In this thematic exploration there are moments when the film flips from its nostalgic “realism” into animated sequences. These take place when Ip Man’s street fights are witnessed by a journalist and subsequently written up as newspaper stories. The drama of the fights is exaggerated in the journalistic narrative, and the film switches to animation as we enter into the fantasy creation of the author.

However, although in this way the film thematizes the media production of myth, the psychological focus of *Ip Man: The Final Fight* not only makes the film resistant to an allegorical reading but also depoliticizes it. The critical reception of *The Final Fight* included voices noting that if the director had wanted to recreate Hong Kong life in the past, then the political situation from the late 1940s to the political unrest of the 1960s should not have been so heavily elided. Of course, political unrest does feature in the film, but the character of Ip Man himself is made to relate to conflict in the mode of a wise elder of the community. But this means that, very much like the other Ips that the series of Ip Man films has thrown forth, Herman Yau’s latest Ip is fundamentally interested in the community, but not macro-politics or even the wider world. The film still needs Bruce Lee, even if the character Ip Man doesn’t: we see Lee performing on Hong Kong television early in the film, and Ip seems unmoved. When Lee takes him out to dinner and attempts to wow him with his money, he remains uninterested.

Even less interested in Bruce Lee is Wong Kar-wai’s film featuring an Ip Man character, *The Grandmaster* (2013). This film is less interested in Bruce Lee – who

does not feature in any clear register – perhaps because it is less interested in Ip Man himself. That is to say, the film is less interested in biography than it is in its own aesthetic, and its own aesthetic has much more in common with the cinematic traditions that Lee and post-Bruce Lee action cinema moved away from.

However, what is interesting is that Wong's film, whilst moving away from "realism" and whilst focusing so centrally on constructing the beauty of each scene, each sequence, even each frame, nevertheless seems to open itself up deliberately for an allegorical and even a political reading. It does this by placing Ip Man not as the sole figure in the center of the film, but as a player in a movement of relations whose center is the quest to produce a center, to occupy it, and to create stability. In the film, Ip Man is called into a role as an ambassador in a project to unite Northern and Southern schools of *kung fu* under one authority and one institution. And this is clearly very easily allegorizable as the nationalist project: how to unite such a vast and complex heterogeneity of spaces and places into one.

Read as a knowing national allegory, however, *The Grandmaster* seems to offer a very subversive message: the nation cannot easily be united or stabilized. There is always a threat and a likelihood of factions emerging, divisions, and their fragmenting in relation to other parts of the institution, and even scattering away. Indeed, as Ip says in an early discussion with Gong Yutian (the master who is seeking to extend his institution up and down and across all of China), he would not want to be limited or organized in anything he does by nationalistic thinking; the world is bigger than China.

The world is bigger, and so is the film. *The Grandmaster* deals with the fragmenting, scattering, and transformation of its initial nationalizing dream. It is a global or transnational film, which aims at, refers to and draws intertextually on a world wider than the borders of China. But still, even if the film seems to escape any direct reference to or reliance on Bruce Lee, and even if its focus is exquisite visual beauty and heroic tragedy rather than "reality," its world is also arguably quite comfortably contained within the velvet prison.

Notes

- 1 My thanks to Keiko Nitta for this information.
- 2 My thanks to my student Vanessa Chan for pointing this out.

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Transitional Stardom

The Case of Jimmy Wang Yu

Tony Williams

Apart from some positive, but relatively brief references by Stephen Teo in *Hong Kong Cinema: The Extra Dimensions* (1997: 99–101, 103–104, 108–109) and *Chinese Martial Arts Cinema* (2009: 68–69, 103–105, 146–147), the star status of Jimmy Wang Yu has remained relatively neglected by most Western explorations of Chinese cinema. Although *kung fu* fans and collectors still remember his key achievements, most Western scholarship tends to concentrate on his more charismatic successor Bruce Lee, despite the relatively small number of films he made during his career. Bruce Lee was the Eastern equivalent to James Dean. Dying at a relatively early age and leaving four films (*The Big Boss* [Lo Wei, 1971], *Fist of Fury* [Lo Wei, 1972], *Way of the Dragon* [Bruce Lee, 1972], and *Enter the Dragon* [Robert Clouse, 1973]) that achieved worldwide distribution, especially in America and the United Kingdom, Lee did not live to face the different challenges of ageing, audience changes in taste, and cinematic industrial developments that affected stars such as Marlon Brando, Peter Fonda, Dennis Hopper, and others who embodied the young rebel aspect of cinematic stardom. By contrast, Jimmy Wang Yu began his career earlier than the young adult Bruce Lee and continues working today, as his recent appearance in Peter Chan's *Wu Xia* (2011) shows.

The purpose of this article is not to belittle the achievements of Bruce Lee but instead focus upon a much more complex star who has been overshadowed by his more charismatic rival. Despite the fact that Wang Yu has been associated with many shoestring Taiwanese action films that appear to tarnish the achievements of the first wave of *kung fu* cinema by their repetition of stock action sequences, poor acting, and bad dubbing in international versions, many of these elements often used

to denigrate the star status of Wang Yu appear in the limited output of the "Little Dragon" himself. As well as the travesties Western distributors have inflicted on Lee's Hong Kong films, certain sequences in *Way of the Dragon* appear little different from their prolific generic contemporaries. Also, had *The Big Boss* been the only Bruce Lee film to survive would we remember the star today? Although released in the West following the success of *Fist of Fury*, *The Big Boss* contains little that may not be found in its contemporary competitors. Had no other films followed then he would probably be remembered today in the same way Alexander Fu Sheng is.

Jimmy Wang Yu lived to continue his career and see it change and decline. Like many other contemporary stars, he coped with the decline of martial arts cinema both in the East and the West following the death of Bruce Lee but continued making swordsman, contemporary, period, and *kung fu* movies as a major star well into the late 1970s. Both stars made different types of international films. While Lee's biggest Western success was *Enter the Dragon*, Wang Yu's *The Man from Hong Kong* (Brian Trenchard-Smith, 1975) did not achieve the critical and commercial acclaim of Lee's venture into international co-production. Although the two stars differed physically, Lee having the most appeal for Western audiences with his Beatle-style haircut and handsome features, in other ways they complemented each other. A two page centerfold color still reproduced in the special issue of *Oriental Cinema* 19 (Foster 2001) devoted to Wang Yu shows both stars together occupying the same frame as equals shaking hands. Bruce Lee had signed a contract with Golden Harvest rather than subject himself to the greater control of Shaw Brothers, Wang Yu's studio up to 1970. Although no date is given for this photo, it may have been taken in 1970, the year which Wang Yu both starred in and directed his epoch-making *The Chinese Boxer* (Wang Yu, 1970). This film may have influenced Bruce Lee into gaining control over his own career as well as wishing to direct as he did, with *Way of the Dragon* and would have done with the posthumously released *The Game of Death* (1978) later finished by Robert Clouse who directed the unsatisfactory, but breakthrough film for Western audiences, *Enter the Dragon*.

Although Wang Yu's career declined, and he is more well-known today for scandals recorded in the Taiwan tabloid press, the circumstances of Lee's death in the apartment of a well-known starlet have never been satisfactorily explained. It is doubtful if Lee's own reputation would have survived untarnished had he not died suddenly. While the trajectory of Lee's future career remains hypothetical, that of Wang Yu is not. Both before and after the death of Bruce Lee, Wang Yu embodied a particular version of transitional stardom, one embodying not only changes in star persona and generic representation but also having much to do with changing cultural and historical circumstances in both China and Hong Kong. These involved the changing aspects of masculine representation that made possible the future careers of later stars such as Bruce Lee and Jet Li performing more varied roles than the archetypal hero of Chinese culture. Even when Wang Yu relocated to Taiwan after breaking his contract with Shaw Brothers, he was able to continue refining the star status he had carefully established in his Hong Kong films under the more

restrictive censorship of the Guomindang government-in-exile established by Chiang Kai-Shek and his successors. Anti-authoritarian elements appeared in several Wang Yu films directed by Chang Cheh. The actor continued this in his later films, especially *The Invincible Sword* (Hsu Teng-Hung, 1972), in which his heroic sacrifice to save an honest general from execution by corrupt government forces comes to nothing due to the attitude of the authoritarian and stubborn victim he is trying to save. Several of Wang Yu's interesting achievements, whether as star and/or director, involve subversive attacks on authoritarian structures. Whether conscious of this or not, this Eastern star often functions in a manner that Patrick McGilligan has defined as one of the interesting features of James Cagney's career: the actor as auteur, a term suggesting that the actor had full control over his star status no matter how many directors he worked under (McGilligan 1982; Teo 2009: 147).¹ But while Cagney only directed one film, the ignominious remake of *This Gun for Hire* (Frank Tuttle, 1941), *Short Cut to Hell* (James Cagney, 1957), Wang Yu directed at least 12 films during his career, produced nine, and scripted five. He is also a key example of what may be termed "transitional stardom." Whereas competitors such as Bruce Lee, Ti Lung, and David Chiang embodied definable traits that make their star personae easily identifiable, no matter how many different genres and historical period dramas they appear in, Wang Yu's stardom is more diverse and interesting in conception. He began his star career in 1964 and preceded Bruce Lee in directing his own film, *The Chinese Boxer* (Wang Yu, 1970), which switched the emphasis of Hong Kong *wuxia* from swordsmanship to unarmed combat. During his Hong Kong career Wang Yu's star status changed from being the gentlemanly fighter of the traditional *Temple of the Red Lotus* films to the dark brooding, masochistic hero of Chang Cheh's pessimistic version of his heroic bloodshed films, a figure who either overcame deadly odds (as did most *wuxia* heroes) or succumbed to a bloody demise following his own code of honor. If Bruce Lee's "Little Dragon" revealed to the world that China was no longer the "Sick Man of Asia" by destroying that demeaning racist sign, "No Dogs. No Chinese," in *Fist of Fury*, Wang Yu also performed a heroic role but at the same time revealed the physical and psychological costs associated with it. Significantly, Bruce Lee dies off camera in *Fist of Fury* as the film ends in a freeze frame and the sound of bullets that we never see penetrating his body. Wang Yu lived longer, saw his stardom reach a peak before its decline in the mid-1970s onwards, leading to cameo roles and Taiwanese potboilers that were pale shadows of his earlier achievements. Wang Yu films dealt with a more varied number of issues in historical and modern periods, really making him a more complex star than Lee. Wang Yu acted in and directed many films, to say nothing about his behind-the-scenes involvement in *The Sword* (Lei Pan, 1971) and other films such as *Knight Errant* (Ting Shan-His, 1973) in which he may have contributed more than just martial arts choreography, a striking contrast to Bruce Lee, who only directed one film, *Way of the Dragon*.

Wang Yu also represents a particular form of "regional imagination" as defined by Yingjin Zhang in *Chinese National Cinema*, but not in terms of an abstract "cultural

ideal" mentioned by Stephen Teo in his chapter on Bruce Lee in *Hong Kong Cinema: The Extra Dimensions*. Rather, it is one related to challenging changing cultural and historical circumstances affecting Chinese masculinity resulting in crisis situations affecting definitions of a hero. (Teo 1997: 112; Zhang 2004: 187–188) This first appears in *One-Armed Swordsman* (Cheh Chang, 1967), in which the hero is torn between loyalty to his adopted *sifu* in a dysfunctional family situation and his decision to leave his potential life as a peaceful farmer to rescue his master. In *Golden Swallow* (Cheh Chang, 1968), Wang Yu's Silver Roc is torn between conflicting desires for his lost love Golden Swallow and destructive sado-masochistic tendencies that lead to his ingrained desire for a violent death as the only way to resolve contradictions affecting his own personality. As Stephen Teo has also shown, *The Sword* is a devastating critique of the martial arts ethos. It focuses upon the deadly conflict between duty and contradictory desires to avoid traditional obligations. This feature may explain the masochistic element that critics such as Tony Rayns have seen in his films (Rayns 1980: 99–100; Rayns 1996: 155–158; Williams 1999: 20; Teo 2009: 147–148).² He gained from his association with Chang Cheh, but he also developed elements within this collaboration as well as sometimes repeating them with little variation, as in *One-Armed Boxer* (Wang Yu, 1972).

Born in the Wuxi Jiangsu Province of China on 28 March 1943, Wang Yu and his parents re-located to Taiwan following the Maoist seizure of control of his homeland. He performed his military service in Taiwan and achieved celebrity status in Hong Kong by winning several swimming and water polo championships before joining Shaw Brothers in 1963. Known also for his expertise in karate and interest in racing cars, the Mandarin-speaking young actor would become a valuable addition for Shaw Brothers, a studio producing Mandarin films as well as beginning to develop *wuxia* movies at this time that emphasized swordsmanship rather than unarmed combat. According to most publicity reports, Wang Yu took the leading role in the black and white, widescreen action film *Tiger Boy* (1966), directed by Chang Cheh, after winning a competition. The film was shot in 1963, released a year later, and re-released in 1966 following Wang Yu's appearance in *Temple of the Red Lotus* (Hsu Teng-Hung, 1965) and its sequel *Twin Swords* (Hsu Teng-Hung, 1965). Co-starring Margaret Tu Chuan, and also featuring several actors the young star would work with at different times of his career, such as Chin Peng, Lo Lieh, and Ku Feng, *Tiger Boy* was a period drama dealing with a wandering knight-errant's quest for revenge on those responsible for his father's death fifteen years before and the romantic entanglements he encounters on the way. *Tiger Boy's* release may have been hindered by the fact that it was made in black and white at a time Shaw Brothers were releasing mostly color films. Unfortunately, this film is difficult to access and Celestial Pictures inform me that they have no plans to re-release it on either DVD or VCD formats. It is difficult to ascertain whether *Tiger Boy* contained intimations of the tormented hero and masochistic bloodshed that became a hallmark of later collaboration between star and director. However, *The Temple of the Red Lotus* and its successors have been re-released on DVD, providing

critics and viewers with an early example of Wang Yu's career in which he exhibits a very different type of star persona from that he would be exclusively associated with in later films made with Chang Cheh and other directors.

Early Developments within the Classical Heroic Tradition

Although prominently featured as leading star on the DVD cover of *Temple of the Red Lotus*, Wang Yu does not really belong to this category in this, one of his early film roles. He is more of a supporting player in an ensemble film featuring the talents of Ivy Ling Po, Chin Ping, Lily Ho, Lo Lieh, Ku Feng, and Fung Bo-bo (known affectionately as the "Shirley Temple of Hong Kong cinema"). *The Temple of the Red Lotus* is a film revealing the influence of *huangmei* music (as seen in the solos sung by Ivy Ling Po of *Love Eterne* fame) and the female narrative chorus heard at several points of the film. It also introduces the *wuxia* influence that would soon rapidly displace such earlier traditions in Hong Kong cinema. The 1928 Shanghai production of *Burning of the Red Lotus Monastery* (Zhang Shichuan, 1928) had actually stimulated *wuxia* influence in literature and film, so it is not surprising that earlier Hong Kong films such as *Strange Hero, Parts One and Two* (Wong Tin-lam, 1950 and 1956), *Three Swordswomen from Guandong* (Ren Pengnian, 1961), *Burning of the Red Lotus Monastery Parts One and Two* (Ling Yun, 1963), and *The Golden Hairpin* (Chan Lit-ban, 1963), also influenced this 1965 film derived from the 1928 Shanghai novel by Xiang Kairin, *Legend of the Strange Hero*. Wang Yu's Gui Wai represents the Confucian hero of a gentle, scholarly hero, deferring to his elders who marries into the Gan family (no longer evil as in the earlier version). He aids them in their fight against bandits masquerading as Red Lotus Temple monks. Realistic swordplay sequences take over from the special effects palm power and magical displays of earlier versions (Lau 1981: 261–266).

The Temple of the Red Lotus is a transitional film in terms of generic development. It reflects the emergence of swordsman action scenes that will take a more prominent role in Shaw Brothers narratives in the future, but the same cannot be said for Wang Yu's performance. Despite the fact that he is an accomplished swordsman, his role in this film is one of respectful acknowledgement of family traditions and female rule. He is a "kinder and gentler" version of the heroes he will portray in later films. Co-starring as the aptly named "Little Wu," Wang Yu's role bears little relation to his later, more familiar roles. A young, scholarly swordsman, deferential to his elders, Little Wu resembles the type of Confucian scholar-hero familiar from any of the popular historical Mandarin Ducks and Butterfly novels of the period. Having lost his family years before, he visits the Jin Clan in Dragon Valley to learn new skills and marry his betrothed Lianzhu (Chin Ping), the granddaughter of clan leader Dragon Jin (Tien Feng). Although nominally headed by Dragon Jin, the clan is female-dominated, with grandmother, mother, daughters,

and great daughter Xioling (Fung Bo-bo) playing prominent roles in decisions and participating in battles. Gui Wu has to work as part of a team that will soon be known as the “Yin and Yan Swordsmen,” a duo anticipating the husband and wife team of Bai Ying and Hsu Feng in King Hu’s *The Valiant Ones* (1975). At this stage, “Little Wu” resembles the “greenhorn” or “tenderfoot” of a Hollywood western often needing his more skilled wife to protect him in difficult situations.

During certain points of the film, the mysterious Scarlet Maid (Ivy Ling Po) appears, aiding characters whenever things get difficult. She reappears in the sequel *Twin Swords*, and we learn that she is Wu’s aunt, the sole survivor of a massacre organized by a rival clan that has taken over the Red Lotus Temple and are masquerading as monks. When the sequel begins Wu and Lianzhu have managed successfully to leave her family, who are not as dangerous as their predecessors in earlier versions. Ignoring Scarlet Maid’s advice to “mind your own business,” Lianzhu persuades a reluctant Wu to rescue a group of women now held in the Temple. But it turns out that the kidnapping has been staged for their benefit. The heroic couple become victims of a trap that results in Lianzhu’s capture. A distraught Wu returns to the Dragon Clan to make tearful pleas for help, something unimaginable in a post-1967 Wang Yu character. He is imprisoned while the resilient females (including Fung Bo-bo) decide to rescue Lianzhu. Despite overwhelming odds, and thanks to the last-minute intervention of Wu, and Scarlet Maid’s welcome appearance, the Red Lotus Clan is defeated and Wu finally manages to avenge himself on the murderer of his family. As in *Temple of the Red Lotus*, Wu is really a subordinate player in the drama who owes much to the help of the female community in this film.

The Sword and the Lute (Hsu Teng-Hung, 1966) concludes the trilogy. Once again, Wu becomes marginalized in a film emphasizing its central female characters portrayed by Ivy Ling Po, Fung Bo-bo (wielding a magic sword), and Lily Ho playing Mei-erh, the *femme fatale* daughter of the rival Flying Tiger clan. Once again Lianzhu disobeys Wu and allows the powerful magic lute to fall into the hands of enemies before Scarlet Maid again intervenes to prevent the worst from happening. Wu participates in the final battle but as a complementary member of the Yin and Yang Swordsmen. The film ends not with a closing shot of Wu but rather Scarlet Maid saying farewell to Xioling.

In this final part of the trilogy, Wang Yu’s character was mostly conspicuous by his absence. However, two films directed by Chang Cheh that precede *One-Armed Swordsman* – *The Magnificent Trio* (1966), and *The Trail of the Broken Blade* (1967) – compensate for this deficiency and take the star in new directions that will eventually lead to the achievement of *One-Armed Swordsman*. As a Shaw Brothers color version of the black and white film *Three Outlaw Samurai* (1964) directed by Hideo Gosha, *The Magnificent Trio* reunites the director and stars of *Tiger Boy* in a film set in the closing years of the Ming Dynasty. Three heroes help a group of peasants who have kidnapped the daughter of a devious local magistrate. Although the credit sequence and DVD cover emphasizes the prowess of Wang Yu, Lo Lieh,

and Cheng Lei, the film's actual credits list three females as the stars, the males appearing in a co-starring capacity. This film is another of Wang Yu's transitional star entries in terms of referencing a previous tradition while subtly breaking away from it, a common feature in his trajectory, always appropriating a tradition but then refining it in specific ways. This time female stars Margaret Tu Chuan, Chin Ping, and Fanny Fan exhibit no swordsmanship prowess at all. Instead, the males now carry the burden of action as they will in future Chang Cheh films. Returning veteran Fang Lu (Wang Yu) decides to aid a group of impoverished villagers resisting the excessive demands of county magistrate Wu Huarie. He is joined by Master Yen (Lo Lieh) and Huang Liang (Cheng Lei) who are initially on opposing sides. At one point of the film Fang berates the kidnapped daughter Wei Wen-chen (Ping Chin) for having no idea of the hunger that the villagers and soldiers fighting the Ching forces endure. The three heroes decide to unite in a common cause of honor. As the doomed Huang later tells his lover, "Loyalty is very important to me. Forget me and go home." Although Fang survives at the end of the film, *The Magnificent Trio* is the first Wang-Yu Chang Cheh collaboration to emphasize torture of the male body, as seen in the 100 lashes he endures as a deal to ensure the safety of the villagers. Although the film explores the corruption of institutional power foreshadowing the devastating analysis in *Blood Brothers* (Chang Cheh, 1972) and intimates that visiting Minister Yan may not restore order at the end, expectations are reversed when government forces do return to save Fang and Yen and execute Wu. However, unlike *The Temple of the Red Lotus* trilogy, there will be no happy ending for Fang and Wei as foreshadowed in the final parting of Huang and Chieh Ying (Margaret Tu Chuan). Powerless to prevent the execution of her father, Wei decides to become a Buddhist nun. The closing shot of the film shows the poignant silent final meeting between Wei at her father's grave and Fang about to ride again into battle against the Ming forces.

Scripted and directed by Chang Cheh, *The Trail of the Broken Blade* (1967) not only reunited Wang Yu with Chu Ping but again cast him in a more secondary role against Chuang Chiao as swordsman Fang. This time, the psychological tensions between following the dictates of family honor and desiring another direction, themes that will be developed in the following two *One-Armed Swordsman* films, become more pronounced. Wang plays Li, a fugitive wanted for killing an official who framed his father. Sought after by Fang who loves Liu (Chi Ping) but who still loves Fang (a plot motif anticipating the eternal triangle motif of *Golden Swallow*), Li is seen in disheveled condition on discovery, attempting to hide away from the world, like David Chiang's character in *The New One-Armed Swordsman* (1971). Returning to his former prowess, Fang engages in a final deadly bloody battle leading to his death. However, in a remarkable ending borrowed from Li Han-Hsiang's *Love Eterne* (1963), the two deceased lovers are transformed into ghostly figures at the end and ascend into heaven leaving Fang to ride away into the distance. Did the so-called "ogre of Hong Kong cinema" really have a sentimental streak in his make-up? This is an echo of the old *huangmei* tradition familiar

from *The Temple of the Red Lotus*, and such a transcendental climax will never again appear in the works of this director. Like *The Temple of the Red Lotus* trilogy, *The Trail of the Broken Blade* mixes traditional and new features. During one scene Liu remembers how Li trained her in the past. As she remembers her beloved, the flashback begins with a shot framing Li within an arch. The camera performs an iris-in to Li, filtered in red as a female chorus chants in the background. It ends as the camera tracks out; blue smoke concludes the sequence. Wang Yu is the handsome object of the traditional female gaze characteristic of pre-Chang Cheh cinema. After Liu commits suicide over the body of her dead lover, a *huangmei* female chorus begins. Li hopes that Liu will forget him and marry the devoted Fang but his chivalric hopes come to nothing. Darker elements that will be developed in the later Chang Cheh/Wang Yu collaborations now enter the film, intimating that a more bloodthirsty type of representation will soon affect this heroic tradition. When Li takes on the lower-class persona of a groom to conceal his real identity, Wang Yu's character wears his Eastern version of a Clint Eastwood beard for the first time. Although Li's death is filmed in a less bloody manner than succeeding films such as *The Assassin* (Chang Cheh, 1967), a rapid shot by the camera reveals he has been disemboweled. The times were now changing in Hong Kong *wuxia* representations and *One-Armed Swordsman* was to herald this change.

Dismemberment and Heroism

One-Armed Swordsman not only provided the breakthrough stardom for Wang Yu but also radically altered the rules of Hong Kong martial arts cinema. Co-scripted with Chang Cheh's frequent collaborator Ni Kuang and choreographed by Tong Gaai and Lau Kar-leung, *One-Armed Swordsman* represents a devastating interrogation of the conflict between Confucian values of loyalty and righteousness, featuring penetrating insights into a corrupt institutional world that has made martial arts values both redundant and dangerous to its practitioners. Such elements occur in early films such as *The Magnificent Trio* and will reach their peak in *Blood Brothers*.

One-Armed Swordsman opens with the dying Fang Cheng receiving a promise from Master Swordsman Qi Rufeng, whose life he has saved in a deadly attack, that his son Fang Gang will become a student at the Golden Sword School. But, far from providing him with dignity and upward mobility, the older Fang Gang (Wang Yu) finds himself humiliated by richer students and scorned by Rufeng's daughter Pei-er, who slices off his arm in a fit of vicious jealousy. He falls off a bridge into the barge of peasant woman, Xiaoman, who nurses him back to health. Like Fang Gang, she is also a victim and orphan of the martial arts world, since her father's values led to downward mobility and poverty. However, when Fang learns that his former master is threatened by two enemies who use unfair techniques he returns to the Golden Sword School to save them, having learned how to use his left arm

by following the instructions in a partially destroyed parchment – a training manual left to Xiaoman by her father. The film ends with Fang reunited with Xiaoman walking into the distance in the only location shot of the entire film.

Although celebrated for its introduction of elements that would soon define the martial arts genre, *One-Armed Swordsman* is less affirmative than it may initially appear. Virtually all the positive characters in the film are negatively affected by martial arts values in one way or another. Qi Rufeng's noble tradition has actually spawned a dysfunctional family made up of petulant daughter and resentful students. Although Fang Cheng believes that the Golden Sword School will bring his son future eminence it actually causes as much pain as the knightly values of Xiaoman's father does to his own family. The broken sword that Fang Cheng left to his son, and the partially destroyed parchment kept by Xiaoman, cause pain and suffering rather than enhancing honor. Also, Xiaoman's family chooses rural poverty rather than face the type of unceasing revenge evoked by the enemies of the Golden Sword School who not only use unheroic methods but also plan the extermination of an entire family. Far from being honorable, the swordsman tradition evokes constant violence as well as psychological pain to those who follow its rules. Towards the end of the film, Fang tells Xiaoman that he has to return to save his former master or "I'll never find peace for the rest of my life." Unlike the doomed heroes of *The Assassin* and *Golden Swallow*, Wang Yu's character survives. He rejects the role of hero in the concluding scene of the sequel, *Return of the One-Armed Swordsman* (Chang Cheh, 1969), in which he finds that those who pleaded with him to save them are in fact dishonorable. The final overhead shot of *One-Armed Swordsman* reveals Master Qi Rufeng and the surviving members of his school standing before the sword he has just broken as if finally conscious of the brutality of a tradition he has espoused as well as the illusionary nature of a retirement he once thought would be graceful and under his control. By contrast, Fang is now free to follow a different lifestyle, and the final shot of the film that breaks away from the studio-bound claustrophobic world that has trapped all its characters shows that for at least two a more positive future emerges.

One-Armed Swordsman is a key achievement for both director and star. Wang Yu's later films will build on this tradition in several ways, ones which also recognize the dangerous nature of the martial arts world and the physical and psychological costs affecting the hero. *The Assassin*, *Golden Swallow*, and *Sword of Swords* (Cheng Kang, 1968) are three such examples. They are interesting variations on motifs contained in *One-Armed Swordsman*, suggesting a particular type of collaborative authorship between director and star.

Written and directed by Chang Cheh, *The Assassin* is one of the most stylish achievements of its director as well as a continuation of that dark interrogation of heroic values begun by *One-Armed Swordsman*. Set in China, 2,300 years ago, *The Assassin* begins with a palace dispute between two rival politicians leading to the exile of Yen Chung-tzu (Tien Feng) and the victory of the malevolent Premier Han Kuei (Huang Chung-Hsin) who takes advantage of an inexperienced young

Emperor to betray Chinese interests. The sequence ends ominously with a caption foretelling that the palace intrigue will “cost the life of a young man.” Like his predecessor in *One-Armed Swordsman*, Wang Yu’s Nieh Cheng comes from a lower-class background. Forced to go into hiding as the sole survivor of his martial arts school and supporting his mother and unmarried sister Nieh Rong (Li Hsiang-Chun) by taking on the humble occupation of a butcher, Nieh’s filial piety impresses Yen Chung-tzu, who sees him as the ideal candidate to assassinate his political rival. The casting of Tien Feng is significant since he usually plays villains in Hong Kong cinema and his role here suggests Chang Cheh’s skepticism about political establishments also seen in *Blood Brothers*. Following the death of his mother and marriage of his sister, Nieh is freed from family responsibilities and ready to undertake a suicidal mission. Before, he had fallen into alcoholism signified by filthy clothes and a “Clint Eastwood” beard, telling Nieh Rong that “Without the Sword, my life’s over.” Despite the fact that he has an opportunity to choose to live with his reunited sweetheart Xia Ying (Chiao Chiao), he chooses his ordained path. Though he succeeds in his mission against overwhelming odds, he not only commits suicide by the most graphic form of disembowelment yet seen in a Chang Cheh film but also slices his face off to prevent retaliation against his family. This does not prevent his sister going to reclaim his body, announce his identity so that his heroic status will be known, and then committing suicide. *The Assassin* ends with the bereaved and pregnant Xia Ying mourning her lover in a similar manner to the heroine of *Blood Brothers*, having lost everything as a result of the destructive *wuxia* code.

This film, along with *Golden Swallow*, reveals Wang Yu’s great accomplishments as an actor. Playing a hero with a self-destructive streak, tied to a code of honor that will lead to his bloody and painful death, Wang Yu’s self-aware and tormented character significantly displays the psychopathological tensions beneath the heroic mask of the hero and the spiritual devastation he leaves behind, as seen in the different fates of Nieh Rong and Xia Ying who are psychologically scarred in different ways. We know nothing about Nieh Rong’s family but it is possible she has left husband and children behind her, while Xia Ying will be left alone to bring up Nieh’s child. It is one of the bleakest endings of any Hong Kong *wuxia* film.

Despite the fact that *Golden Swallow* is a very different sequel to *Come Drink with Me*, the focus on Wang Yu’s Silver Roc rather than Cheng Pei-pei’s heroine belongs to the collaborative critique by both star and director of the male heroic tradition (Teo 2009: 102–104). Silver Roc is perhaps the most masochistic, self-destructive hero in Chang Cheh’s gallery so far. Dominated by an overwhelming death wish far exceeding that of any of the characters he played so far, he not only desires his own death but expresses his morbid love for *Golden Swallow* by incriminating her in his own murderous activities. His bloody death leaves *Golden Swallow* and Roc’s mistress to waste their lives mourning a seriously disturbed character despite the love Han Tao (Lo Lieh) has for *Swallow*. In Cheng Kang’s *Sword of Swords* (1968), Wang Yu’s Ling Tseng-Hsaio does survive at the end although blinded by

the villain. Left with his baby son to care for, this betrayed hero does manage to recover a secret weapon stolen from him by someone who has also slaughtered his family. Again, the cost of the heroic ideal is questionable, a theme that the star later explored in his co-directed (with Pan Lei) Taiwan–Hong Kong co-production *The Sword* (1972) that Stephen Teo has described as another “ambitious critique of the knight errant’s worship of swords, a fundamental prop in the whole mythology of wuxia” (Teo 2009: 147). It is another film questioning the values of the heroic tradition that the star had explored in his films with Chang Cheh.

During the time *One-Armed Swordsman* appeared Hong Kong was affected by the Star Ferry Riots and Maoist demonstrations, the latter featured in one prominent scene of John Woo’s *Bullet in the Head* (1990). Even before these events, Chinese values were under threat both from the anti-Confucian campaign and the subsequent development of what became the Cultural Revolution in China and from the rapid modernization in Hong Kong that saw changes in life-styles and capitalist development. Although no direct historical influences can be traced to the Wang-Yu/Chang Cheh films of this era, it must be noted that this was a period of rapid change; the instabilities, both psychological and institutional, may have indirectly affected these films.

The Star as Director

Wang Yu finally persuaded Run Run Shaw to allow him to write and direct a film – *The Chinese Boxer* (1970). Despite this first full-time credit, one source also lists Ng See-yeun and Yang Jingchen as assistants, probably indicating the cautious and watchful eye of Run Run Shaw (Lau 1980: 202). Set in the early Republican era, the film changed the face of *wuxia* by concentrating on unarmed combat rather than swordsmanship. Although eclipsed by succeeding films that make its premises appear dated, *The Chinese Boxer*, both scripted and directed by Wang Yu, was the archetype and key example for what followed. Directed in a more functional and sparse manner than Chang Cheh, *The Chinese Boxer* uses excessive zooms and close-ups while also framing the beginning of the final combat in long shot with all protagonists (except for the treacherous Tao Erh) in an impressively placed mise-en-scène structure. Like *The Magnificent Trio*, *The Chinese Boxer* is both a reworking and a challenge to the 1965 Japanese film *Judo Saga* (Lau 1980: 202; Palmer, Palmer and Meyers 1995: 71–72, 178, 299).³ It appropriates contemporary Japanese traits of bloodshed and violence, while at the same time espousing the values of the Chinese martial arts tradition. As Lei Ming’s doomed teacher tells his students, karate actually originated in the Tang Dynasty before it was developed into a more aggressive and hostile form in Japan, with its goal becoming the crippling or killing of the opponent. By contrast, the more disciplined form of Chinese martial arts emphasizes control and good citizenship. It is

not surprising that Japanese sympathizer and renegade disciple Tao Erh is certainly not a good citizen but has allied himself with the more aggressive form of karate. He has collaborated with Japanese experts whose nation will pursue a more aggressive policy towards China in the following decades.

The film is based on a well-known novel by Tsuneo Tomita set in the Meiji era that began the process of Japan's militarization and modernization that would culminate in World War II. It appears that Wang Yu and his collaborators may have been fully aware of the nationalist aggressiveness that lay behind the original versions and decided to contrast the values of Chinese martial arts to those of its more dangerous nationalistic counterpart. As others have noted, this is one of the first martial arts films to show the Japanese taking over a Chinese town, an obvious reference to Manchuria, and to make it clear that they plan to acquire more territory before they are stopped (Palmer et al. 1995: 57). Featuring Chen Kuan-tai and Yuen Woo-ping as imported Japanese fighters, the film also casts Lo Lieh as Lei Ming's Japanese arch-enemy Kitashima, with whom he fights a bloody duel at the climax. *The Chinese Boxer* appropriates elements from many sources, for instance the falling snow from *One-Armed Swordsman* and from Hollywood Westerns the gunfight where the antagonists stare at each other before the final draw (in this case of knives rather than revolvers). But by placing detailed emphasis on the unique values of Chinese martial arts training and emphasizing the positive qualities of national identity before foreign invaders, well before Bruce Lee's *Fist of Fury*, *The Chinese Boxer*, despite its crudities and emphasis on bloody violence, deserves credit as a key film. It anticipated elements like the importance of Chinese solidarity that would occur a year later in Bruce Lee's first major Hong Kong film *The Big Boss* (1971) and *King Boxer* (1972) another multiethnic Shaw Brothers film directed by a Korean with a Chinese cast headed by Lo Lieh and Wang Ping, who had both appeared in *The Chinese Boxer*.

By this time, Wang Yu had broken his contract with Shaw Brothers and relocated to Taiwan, where he made films of varying quality, often formulaic conceptions, for the remainder of his career as a leading star. However, there were exceptions. In 1971, he scripted and directed *One-Armed Boxer*. Although shamelessly borrowing the main idea from *One-Armed Swordsman*, *One-Armed Boxer* was also a development of themes initially explored in *The Chinese Boxer*. This time a noble Chinese school faces competition from a rival one. Defeated in combat by the *sifu* of star pupil Liu Li-Tung (Wang Yu), the embittered loser imports a multiethnic group of fighters including two Thai boxers, a lama, deadly Sikh, and a Japanese fighter with fangs resembling Count Dracula (an image that may well have inspired Run Run Shaw to launch *The Legend of the 7 Golden Vampires*). Losing his arm in combat with this character, Liu Li-Tung recuperates and learns from an old training manual how to use his other arm. Fully regaining his powers, he challenges the villains to battle in a quarry resembling the one from the opening scenes of *The Chinese Boxer* and ends the film restoring Chinese honor against all other national adversaries.

Scripted and directed by Wang Yu, *Beach of the War Gods* (1972) in Stephen Teo's words, "offers a kind of coda to the passing of the old genre" (Teo 1997: 108) in being

the swordfight movie to end all swordfight movies. Set in the Ming Dynasty period of 1556, it again deals with the theme of Japanese invasion, now placed in historical times. First seen in long shot as a solitary figure walking along a deserted beach, Wang Yu's Hsia Feng again evokes his Eastern appropriation of Clint Eastwood's Italian Western hero. But, unlike Eastwood and one of Feng's future allies (a critique of Eastwood, perhaps?), he is not in it for money but to protect a vulnerable village from Japanese aggression. Clearly indebted to Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai* (1954) as well as other international remakes of that film, *Beach of the War Gods* is really a film featuring every weapon every seen in a swordplay movie as well as representing a "last hurrah for chivalry" of the swordplay movie by featuring extended combat sequences one lasting as long as twenty minutes (Teo 1997: 108–109).⁴ As the film ends, Feng defeats his most dangerous foe in bloody combat. The villagers rush after the fleeing Japanese, leaving Feng standing erect momentarily before falling to the ground.

In these Taiwanese films, Wang Yu's heroes either die or defeat their enemies, who inflict bloody wounds upon them. A masochistic dimension is common to both his Hong Kong and Taiwanese films, but it operates in different ways. Whereas Tony Rayns sees the star as trapped by the star persona Chang Cheh constructed for him, leading to the failure of his attempts "insofar as his subsequent work remained locked within precisely the same syndrome," certain variations occur in his later screen career that suggest attempts to resolve the dilemma of the masochistic hero (Rayns 1980: 99). Whereas films such as *The Sword* continue the process begun by Chang Cheh interrogating the psychological instability of the martial arts hero (*The Assassin*, *Golden Swallow*), others attempt either to find some resolution of this dilemma or focus indirectly upon the institutional forces that cause such dilemmas.

In *One-Armed Boxer vs. The Flying Guillotine* (a.k.a. *Master of the Flying Guillotine*), a sequel to *One-Armed Boxer* written and directed by Wang Yu in 1975, the hero's energies are directed less towards bloody masochism than in a patriotic direction, continuing motifs found in *The Chinese Boxer*. Set in 1730, the film pits Wang Yu's hero against the blind, but deadly, master of the flying guillotine who enlists a Thai boxer and Indian fighter in his entourage in much the same way as the renegade *sifu* of the earlier film. Although the patriotic motif may seem a cop-out from the dark explorations of the Chang Cheh films, it develops some of the positive nationalistic aspects of the Chinese martial arts tradition initially seen in *One-Armed Boxer*. Wang Yu's *sifu* looks after his students, using them only to prevent the barefooted Thai boxer from escaping a heated floor during combat, and then dismissing them to fight the deadly master on his own. Unlike Chang Cheh, Wang Yu develops the philosophical dimensions of Chinese martial arts. He realizes that neither escape nor reliance on the technical abilities of *kung fu* can ensure victory. Other methods are important. One of these is espousing the values of the defeated Ming Dynasty against the occupying forces of the Ching and their foreign allies.

Return of the Chinese Boxer, produced and directed by Wang Yu in 1975, shows the hero defeating Japanese ninjas by superior *kung fu* skills. Set in the Ching

dynasty it deals with Japanese territorial designs on China, and contains a line ominously foreshadowing Japanese commercial exploitation in the next century. "Greater Prosperity, that's what we want for both of us." Despite its patchy nature, the film features several interesting innovations. Opening with a credit sequence demonstrating Jimmy Wang-Yu's martial arts skills in a way similar to those of Jackie Chan are exhibited in *Snake in the Eagle's Shadow* (1978), it contains many strokes of originality, such as the hero battling *kung fu* zombies and a climax evoking the hall of mirrors sequence in *The Lady from Shanghai* (1948) with identical waxwork images replacing the reflections in the original film. The hero, Sau Pai-lung (Wang Yu), easily overcomes the firepower deployed by his opponent, Black Crane, by employing waxwork dummies modeled on himself.

Although not ascribed to the star as director, two other Taiwanese films contain interesting variations on Wang Yu's heroic role. In both *Blood of the Dragon* (1971) and *The Invincible Sword* (1972), he portrays variants on the lone swordsman who is let down in various ways by the representatives of institutional patriotic values. The first film sees him aiding a prince during the era of Mongol control of China by allowing him to escape the deadly machinations of treacherous prime minister. Like his earlier counterparts, he dies in bloody combat against his foes. However, the film contains certain ironies. Due to the treacherous techniques used by the prince in combat (resembling those of the evil school in *One-Armed Swordsman*) Lung Ti suffers a wound, making him as vulnerable as Cole Thornton in *El Dorado* (1966). Although he forgives the prince, recognizing him as a true patriot, this action does not affect his prowess but leads to a death that could be avoided, something that a young boy character (modeled on the Brandon de Wilde character in *Shane*) tearfully recognizes at the end. In *The Invincible Sword*, Wang Yu's Ling Yu-fong's patriotic efforts to save his beloved general from unjust execution come to nothing. After Ling Yu-fong gives his life to rescue the general, the latter decides to submit to the arbitrary customs of his society, rendering the final battle completely wasteful.

Directed by Gam Sing-yan (but sometimes credited to Wang Yu) with martial arts choreography by Liu Chia-Yung, *One-Armed Chivalry Fights Against One-Arm Chivalry* (Gam Sing-yan, 1977) typifies many of the formulaic productions Wang Yu made during his Taiwan period. Influenced not just by *One-Armed Swordsman* but also *One-Armed Swordsmen*, this film again offers two swordsmen for the price of one but this time supplying background information about their condition. "Disability" is too strong a word to use for the condition represented in this film since both Wang Yu's character Chi Chu-Chang and his younger counterpart Lu Tien-Chu (Liu Chia-Yung) both make rapid recoveries following their respective losses – unlike the characters played by Wang Yu in *One-Armed Swordsman* and *One-Armed Boxer*. Set in the Ching Dynasty, Wang Yu plays the top fighter in the patriotic Kuang Wah Association who has to amputate his arm due to a poison dart inserted there by a treacherous female agent. This does not stop him killing all his adversaries as well as the key antagonist, who has engineered his entrapment

by impaling him on a tree with his sword while the woman escapes. The film then moves into two complicated sub-plots. One deals with the machinations of Ching agent Pan Keung-yan trying to destroy Kuang Wah group unity by framing Chi for a crime he did not commit; the other deals with the vengeance quest of the younger one armed swordsman who is a survivor of a past family massacre engineered by Pan, who adopts a baby from the victim family as his own son – a plot motif borrowed from the Italian Western *Seven Dollars on the Red* (Alberto Cardone, 1966). After a series of complicated plot maneuvers the two brothers are reunited. Chi finally battles Ching mastermind Lord Hu Ta in an abandoned mill. This final sequence represents the type of climactic set-piece usual in Wang Yu's Taiwanese films, but utilizes items such as a water sluice and flour, the type of everyday items that Jackie Chan will later use for his fights in 1980s Hong Kong films, in a highly effective manner. Unlike most of his Taiwan films, the wounded Chi tends his wounds after the death of Hu Ta and walks away to live and fight another day. Like El Cid, he passes from history into legend.

Modern Times

Although Wang Yu is often associated with period films, he has also made contemporary films throughout his career. While the intriguingly titled *A Cookbook of Birth Control* (Chen Hao, 1975) remains difficult to find, other films are not. In Yueh Feng's *Auntie Lan* (1967), he plays the doomed fiancée of the title character in a film dealing with the serious problem of single parenthood in Hong Kong. Although he only appears during the first 33 minutes of the film, Wang Yu delivers a convincing performance of contemporary modern youth in a world torn between traditional and changing values. Shot in the same year as *The Chinese Boxer* (Wang Yu, 1970), Lo Chen's *My Son* (1969) features Jimmy as a contemporary juvenile delinquent at odds with his detective father (Tien Feng) and torn between conflicting values paralleling those in his period films directed by Chang Cheh. Although *Asia-Pol* (Akinori Matsuo, 1967) belongs to the Hong Kong James Bond/Jane Bond cycle of imitations, it does contain certain interesting variations on well-known themes. Wang Yu plays adopted Japanese-Chinese agent Ming Hua. Set in exotic Tokyo, Hong Kong, and Macao locations, *Asia-Pol* blurs national boundaries by pitting Ming Hu against a Japanese-Chinese villain determined to ruin the Japanese economy in revenge for the abandonment of his Malayan-Chinese mother by her Japanese husband. Diverted from his flirtations with fellow agent Sachiko (modeled on Miss Money Penny from the Bond films), Ming Hua arrives in Hong Kong too late to be reunited with his father but encounters his younger sister again before saving the Japanese economy by eliminating the villain and flying off to Bangkok with Sachiko for his next assignment. This is a very unusual Wang Yu film showing him equally at home in the modern day and wearing stylish

suits. Thus his encounter with former James Bond George Lazenby now playing a villain in *The Man from Hong Kong*, directed by Brian Trenchard Smith is less unusual than it seems. As Hong Kong Inspector Fang Sing-leng, he not only gets to sleep with two different Caucasian females, thus breaking another screen taboo and doing something that Bruce Lee never did on screen, but also defeats Lazenby's heavily armed, racist villain in unarmed combat.

The Man from Hong Kong could have been Wang Yu's breakthrough film in the West, as *Enter the Dragon* was for Lee, but it never succeeded critically or commercially, possibly due to rapidly decreasing Western interest in *kung fu* films following the death of Bruce Lee. Other Hong Kong action stars such as Angela Mao Ying, Ti Lung, and David Chiang also faced problems in films designed for Western audiences at this time, as low-budget productions of *Stoner* (Huang Feng, 1974), and Hammer-Shaw Brothers co-production *The Legend of the 7 Golden Vampires* (Roy Ward Baker, 1974) all show. Despite such problems Wang Yu films remained popular with Eastern audiences until his star status declined, scandals in his personal life reached the headlines, and his lithe, body eventually changed, leading to his taking cameo or supporting roles in later films.

Many later Wang Yu films reflect memories of the Japanese Occupation of China, as seen in the villainous Japanese antagonists in films such as *One-Armed Boxer*, *Ten Fingers of Steel* (a.k.a. *Screaming Ninja/The Screaming Tiger*) (Kim Lung, 1973), and *Knight Errant*, but none of his films engage in gratuitous Jap-bashing. In *Seaman No.7* (a.k.a. *Wang Yu's 7 Magnificent Fights*) (Lo Wei, 1973), seaman Wang Hai-Lung stows away on a ship bound for Japan, is reunited with his Chinese cousins and defeats Japanese smugglers led by Golden Hair (played by Chinese actor James Tien!) with the aid of the Japanese police. Although many films reveal lingering memories of an unhappy historical period involving Chinese-Japanese relations, other films do realize the importance of now maintaining more positive connections. In Lo Wei's *A Man Called Tiger* (1976), Jimmy's character joins the *yakuza* in a search for his missing father parallel to that undertaken by heroine Maria Yi. Like *Asia-Pol*, the film touches on the complex nature of transnational associations that may explain why Wang Yu is also very popular in Japan, since, like Jackie Chan's later explorations, he often deals with the changing nature of a developing global economy, challenging national definitions and relationships. Similarly, Lo Wei's *The Tattooed Dragon* (1973) borrows motifs from his earlier Bruce Lee film *The Big Boss* to show again the exploitation of Chinese immigrants in Thailand. This time, they are helped by Jimmy's wandering knight errant who, like the later Jackie Chan, will use whatever object is handy to confront his enemies such as a bench (paralleling Jimmy's use of a fountain in a brothel in the 1972 *Furious Slaughter*) as well as re-employing the trick from an earlier film of wiggling his ear to detect the role of dice. This latter action is a key example of "the actor as auteur" since it occurs in films directed by two different directors.

Many innovative moments occur in the actor's Taiwan films that make them interesting to watch but, unfortunately, many of his late 1970s and 1980s vehicles range from the mediocre to the bizarre, such as his role as Viet Cong guerilla war

expert “Jimmy” involved in a plot masterminded by IRA terrorist George Lazenby and members of the Japanese Red Army to assassinate the Queen in *A Queen’s Ransom* (Ting Shan-His, 1976) and leading a team in Chu Yen-Ping’s aptly named *Fantasy Mission Force* (Chu Yen-Ping, 1979). However, several of these films show the actor re-employing his techniques as a former champion swimmer (as he does in *My Son*) in certain sequences seen in *Four Real Friends* (a.k.a. *The Dragon Squad*) (Wang Yu, 1976) and the extended underwater swimming battle in *Deadly Silver Spear* (a.k.a. *The Silver Hermit from Shaolin Temple*) (Sung Ting-Mei, 1977).

The Dragon in Winter

From 1980, following a series of scandals in Taiwan, one involving a charge of murder, Jimmy Wang Yu directed no more films and his appearances became sporadic (Chan and Yang 1998: 246, 248; Down 2001; Gendron).⁵ His period of stardom was now finally over. In 1984, he appeared as Black Hat in Chang Cheh’s *Shanghai 13*, reuniting the veteran director with many of the Shaw Brothers stars whose career he made possible such as Danny Lee, Ti Lung, David Chiang, Chen Kuan-tai, and two of the Five Deadly Venoms. 1986 saw him playing Master Wong, the father of the legendary Wong Fei-hong in Sammo Hung’s “Who’s Who in Hong Kong Cinema?” movie, *The Millionaire’s Express*. 1990 saw him working again with the bizarre Taiwanese director Chu Yen-Ping in *Island of Fire*, a prison drama bringing together Jackie Chan, Andy Lau, Sammo Hung, and Tony Leung Kar-fai in which he played the small, but significant, role of prison boss Kui/Lucas who ends up betrayed by the Sammo Hung character. Now aged, with a body no longer as slim as in his heyday, it was clear that his star period was over. Two years later he would appear in an even shorter role as a hired assassin in Chu Yen-Ping’s underrated Taiwanese crime film *Requital* (1992). Also in 1992, he delivered a convincing performance as the millionaire businessman father of Leon Lai in Ronny Yu’s melancholy comedy *Shogun and Little Kitchen* that revealed his capacity to move into supporting roles. Due to his breach of contract with Shaw Brothers, Wang Yu supposedly could not return to Hong Kong due to threat of legal action but a 2002 photo shows him together with Run Run Shaw in a photo taken at Chang Cheh’s funeral. Since Shaw Brothers were no longer making films and over 35 years had passed since the original incident perhaps Sir Run Run felt generous towards his former star, or perhaps the statute of limitations had passed? It is difficult to tell but Wang Yu was certainly not completely confined to Taiwan: he was in Hong Kong during the filming of *The Man from Hong Kong*.

Wing Shan’s Taiwanese production *The Beheaded 1,000* (1993) could easily have been Wang Yu’s swansong. No longer portraying the young hero, he now plays elderly executioner Ren Detie in a film very much indebted to the Hong Kong *Chinese Ghost Story* series and featuring everyone’s favorite female ghost, Joey Wong. Set in the Ming Dynasty, Executioner Ren cannot enjoy the retirement he plans due to the vengeful

activities of a clan he has executed years ago. Intending to save his daughter and future son-in-law, he decides to perform a deed of self-execution thus ensuring a positive karma when he will return to earth as a hero. However, his gracious deed receives a far greater reward when Ren becomes reincarnated into a spiritual hero who will pursue the cause of justice throughout eternity. Despite being overwhelmed by special effects, *The Beheaded 1,000* revealed that the former actor-star was capable of delivering a dignified performance espousing the values of heroism and patriotism characteristic of his earlier roles but far removed from their tormented aspects.

The star persona of Wang Yu is less easy to define than that of either Jackie Chan or Bruce Lee since, due to its longevity, it exhibits several complexities. He began his career in the mid-1960s playing the young Confucian hero, before graduating to his best-known roles as the tormented hero of the Chang Cheh films, torn between duty and desire for a different life. Then, after becoming the first actor-director-star in Hong Kong cinema with *The Chinese Boxer* he relocated to Taiwan and became associated with many poor formula films and personal scandals. However, Wang Yu deserves greater recognition. His star status has always been transitional and never entirely fixed in the manner of his more prestigious contemporaries. Apart from one attempted breakthrough into Western audience recognition, he has always espoused a commercial cinematic vision of Chinese values whether patriotic or reflecting the tensions inherent within changing definitions of masculinity and their relationship to institutional values. Beginning his career as the dutiful Confucian hero of *The Temple of the Red Lotus*, he pioneered the role of the masochistic hero of the “heroic bloodshed” world of Chang Cheh in characters who displayed tensions between obedience to traditional codes and resentment against their imposition. It is not surprising that his recent appearance as the deadly master in *Wu Xia* sees him playing a variant of those patriarchal forces his younger self fought against in the formative years of his career.

Wang Yu’s stardom displays cultural tensions between restraint and rebellion (whether implicit or explicit). It is within these realms that his star significance lies, ones that should receive further exploration despite the varied, uneven achievements of an actor who is now approaching veteran status as a living legend in Hong Kong and Taiwanese cinema.

Notes

- 1 Teo notes that Wang Yu so outclasses himself in his performance that the whole film can be said to be self-driven.
- 2 For an early essay dealing with the problematic aspects of the swordsman tradition see Tony Rayns (1996: 155–158). Note also Tony Rayns (1980: 99–100); and Tony Williams (1999: 18–20), who also notes these features and describes him as the “George Raft of Taiwanese cinema due to presumed Triad associations” (20).

- 3 Produced by Akira Kurosawa, directed by Seiichiro Uchikawa and, starring Toshiro Mifune, *Judo Saga* was a remake of Kurosawa's *Sanshiro Sugata* (1943) that was banned and supposedly destroyed by the American Occupation troops and later remade by Shockiku Studios as *Dawn of Judo*. See *The Encyclopedia of Martial Arts Movies*.
- 4 As Teo remarks, Wang Yu becomes "the eternal swashbuckler calling all warriors to arms."
- 5 He was charged with murder in Taiwan during 1981 but released due to lack of evidence. Scandals involving his association with the Triads still continue today and are often reported by Taiwanese news sources. He supposedly helped Jackie Chan break his contract with Lo Wei in the 1970s, leading to Jackie repaying the favor by appearing in *Island of Fire*.

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Camp Stars of Androgyny

A Study of Leslie Cheung and Anita Mui's Body Images of Desire

Natalia Siu-hung Chan

The year 2003 was the dark age of Hong Kong popular culture: two superstars, Leslie Cheung and Anita Mui, suddenly ended their lives in April and December respectively. Born in 1956, Leslie Cheung Kwok-wing was the youngest son of a Hong Kong tailor who made suits for William Holden and Alfred Hitchcock. After a year studying textile management at the University of Leeds, he returned to Hong Kong and later won first runner-up in ATV's Asian Music Contest in 1976. He pursued a career as a TV actor from 1978 to 1985 on local programs, and released his album *Restless Breeze* in 1983, which launched his career as one of the most popular singers in Hong Kong. Although Cheung started his film career in the late 1970s, he did not receive much public attention until 1987 when he starred in John Woo's *A Better Tomorrow* (1986) and Stanley Kwan's *Rouge* (1987). He was awarded Best Actor at the Golden Film Festival in Hong Kong for his brilliant performance in Wong Kar-wai's art film *Days of Being Wild* in 1990. He gained international recognition later when Chen Kaige's gay opera film *Farewell My Concubine* (1993) was awarded the Palme d'Or at Cannes and the Golden Globe Award for Best Foreign Picture. As a Canto-pop singer, Cheung distinguished his stage performance by his seductive image of a dandy in the 1980s and his crossover style in the 1990s. As an actor, he presented his charm, tenderness, and elegance in such films as *Rouge* and *A Chinese Ghost Story* (Ching Siu-tung, 1987) and his gay femininity in *Farewell My Concubine*, *He's a Woman, She's a Man* (Peter Chan, 1994) and *Happy Together* (Wong Kar-wai, 1997). He put an end to his glamorous life at the age of 46 when he leapt to his death from the 24th floor of the Mandarin Oriental Hotel on April 1, 2003. Cheung's suicide became the top

story in Hong Kong as well as other Asian cities, for he represents a queer figure of gender-crossing unprecedented in the history of Hong Kong popular culture.

In contrast to Leslie Cheung's film-aristocratic background, Anita Mui Yim-fong was born into a lower-class family in 1963. She started her singing career in lounges and street-side gigs with her elder sister at the age of four in order to support her family. A precocious child without any happy memories of her childhood and family life, Mui trained herself as a professional singer before entering show business proper. She won The New Talent Singing Award held by the local television station TVB in 1982 when she was 19. Collaboration with the well-known image consultant Eddie Lau helped Mui to transform herself into a stylish pop icon and earn the reputation as "The Madonna of the East" during the 1980s. Her songs, albums, music videos, concerts, and stage performances, including *Debts of Love*, *Breaking the Icy Mountain*, *Bad Girls*, *Stand by Me*, *Sunset Melody*, *Elegance of the Lost World*, not only gained her worldwide recognition, but also represented the public memory of the city, thanks to her stylized costumes and powerful showmanship. In addition, Mui also showed brilliant skill in acting when she starred as a female ghost in Stanley Kwan's nostalgia film *Rouge* in 1987, for which she won the Best Actress at The Golden Horse Award in Taiwan and the Hong Kong Film Award. As the Ever-Changing Queen of Pop, Anita Mui's presented multiple images ranging from bad girl, tomboy, fair lady, femme fatale, and goddess in popular music to ghost, mother and wife, women's warrior, and male impersonator in films. She displayed her female (bi)sexuality and lesbianism in her songs, notably "Two Women," "Single Woman," and "Eve, Eve." On the other hand, she exhibited her female masculinity, gender-crossing, and androgynous appeal in such movies as *The Heroic Trio* (Johnnie To, 1993), *Executioners* (Ching Siu-tung and Johnnie To, 1993), *Kawashina Yoshiko* (Eddie Ling-ching Fong, 1990), *Rouge*, and *Wu Yen* (Johnnie To and Wai Ka-fai, 2001). Sadly, Mui died of cancer at the age of 40.

Engaging the discourse of body politics, and the theory of sexuality, my paper interrogates Cheung and Mui's gender performativity in Hong Kong popular culture. I will examine first Cheung's cross-gender identity and intersexuality in music videos, his androgynous dressing and make-up in concerts as well as the multiple images of his male/gay femininity in films. Then, I will discuss Mui's female masculinity, and her gender representation as a cross-dresser in filmmaking. My purpose is to investigate the body politics, the sexual identity, and the gender performativity of Leslie Cheung and Anita Mui as a queer subject of position as well as the cultural memory of the city.

Leslie Cheung's Phantasmagoric Stage Attire and Cross-dressing

The early Leslie Cheung, in both his everyday attire and costumes for album covers, displays a chic style and a radically innovating aesthetics, highlighting how his acute sense of fashion lay way ahead of his contemporaries. Not only did it reveal a

sensibility to Western popular music and the vogues in fashion, it also exemplified Cheung's tendency to surpass and challenge conventional norms. Leslie Cheung in his early days assumed the stylized outfits of the French fashion designer Jean Paul Gaultier in his everyday dress, cementing the foundation of their future collaboration; apart from that, he was also a fan of the Giorgio Armani suit, and was one of those rare men who could look suave in it despite their modest build. From the mid-1980s, Cheung's image shifted decisively to a more casual one, from a stately elegance to a more energized and dynamic style, matching the vibrant design of Gianni Versace and Romeo Gigli. In the early 1990s, Leslie reverted to a more stately and elegant style, like a nobleman with a sense of dignified maturity. Later, clothing became a reconstruction of Leslie's sexual identity and also a re-articulation of his personal feminine attributes. After the mid-1990s, his attire became an effective articulation of emotions and identity; on stage, he displayed the image of "embodying femininity within a male body," and in his songs and music videos, he demonstrated the possibility of mutual liberation between body and clothing. If sexual identity is akin to clothing, which can be changed, transformed, and misplaced at will, then the source of Leslie's appeal and controversy lay in his endlessly varying image on stage which alternated between masculinity and femininity. By compelling the audience to reflect upon the intricate connection between clothing and sexual identity, Leslie's performance marked an unprecedented paradigm in the history of Hong Kong performing arts and popular music. At the same time it also touched upon various social taboos and sexual prejudices; all these converged to create his unique, legendary allure. Through exploring Leslie's cross-dressing on stage and the representation of an androgynous image in his music videos, this section aims to open up space for discussion on the discourse of sexuality.

The Drag Queen on Stage

I think the pinnacle of achievement for an artist is the embodiment of the two sexes in one person. Art itself is asexual.

Leslie Cheung's stage performances and musical videos throughout his career testify to this artistic vision, one that blends the male and female bodies: the use of clothing as a medium to transgress gender boundaries and challenge conventional norms, the establishing of a new fluidity of sexuality, the lasciviously glamorous looks of the drag queen on stage, or the fleeting images of androgyny in music videos – all bestow upon the Hong Kong entertainment industry an unprecedented and groundbreaking paradigm. The acclaim and controversy that his performances evoked reflected and tested the accepted boundaries of the city. During *Leslie Cheung Live in Concert 97*, he gave a dazzling cross-dressing performance when singing the song *Red*, written by Lin Xi. In glittering black trousers and red high-heeled shoes, and wearing red lipstick, he performed a sensuous and provocative dance with half-naked male dancers.

Eventually he became the talk of the town. Leslie's drag performance on this occasion moves away from the constructed diegetic space in films to the theatrical stage, a drag performance of a male impersonating a female.

As Garber (1992) points out in her discussion of male cross-dressing, the sexual meaning of "drag" lies in the way in which, through the discourse of clothes and display of the body, it deconstructs the social norm of sexuality as inborn and innate. Garber's discussion of "drag" encompasses several forms and levels: it can be incongruous, for instance; it can be in a mixed form, for instance, only wearing partial feminine costume, including accessories such as earrings, lipstick, and high-heeled shoes. Another level of drag is the integration of contradictions, for instance, while the cross-dresser sports a feminine outfit, at the same time he intentionally emphasizes his masculine traits, such as a coarse voice and a flat chest, to construct an androgynous image. If we try to analyze Leslie's cross-dressing through Garber's theory, we can see that his performance at this concert differed saliently from his performance in *Farewell my Concubine*. On the Peking Opera stage in the film, he is at pains to perform the role/identity of a female/female character in order to convince the audience within the diegesis of the film that he can be an effeminate woman. In the narrative of the film, the audience is acutely aware of the fact that the Yuji (Consort Yu) on the Peking Opera stage is played by a man; in the opera, the Yuji is a woman, the last woman, remaining at Xiang Yu's side as he faces his imminent demise. Thus the crux of the performance of Dieyi/Leslie Cheung is to enact the role of this woman, so his representation on the Peking Opera stage is wholly female, including the dubbing of a female voice. In contrast, at his own-concerts, Leslie's drag performance represents a combined mode that denies a full identification with a male or female. On one hand he is wearing a pair of bewitching high heels, puts on a glossy red lipstick and poses in feminine and seductive gestures; at the same time, this feminine image is only partial since he also partially projects maleness; for instance, he does not put on a wig or wear a dress, and his black clothing speckled with glitter is, relatively speaking, a gender-neutral style. Furthermore, his hairstyle and voice remain masculine. This intricate mixing of masculine and feminine attributes exemplifies the androgynous form.

The cross-dressing performance of Leslie at his concert was androgynous in nature. What the audience saw was actually a performance of a male singer impersonating a female, as his male identity remained apparent in terms of attire and posture; however, his feminine dressing and style rendered it difficult for the audience to wholly identify with him as a male. This ambivalent sexuality, which affirms the cross-dresser as both male and female and simultaneously denies him as such, clearly manifests a gender transgression, creating for the audience a double reading of sexual difference and gender roles. Seen from this perspective, the body of Leslie Cheung at this concert became a tool to display sexual difference: through the displacement of sexual difference, it subverted conventional, fixed assumptions and parameters of sexual difference. This echoes the point made earlier with reference to Garber's theory, namely the way in which

clothes epitomize a form of text, and the way that the interchangeability between male and female attire which represents a form of intertextuality, concomitantly, represents a stage of intersexuality. In particular, the *Live in Concert* camera incessantly provided close-ups of Leslie's costume from various angles, dissecting fixed sexual formation into fragments, and capturing the way that, through the imaginative allure of the stage, the audience was able to reconstruct sexuality as an androgynous, organic whole. At another level, Leslie's drag performance also embodied his ambiguous sexual assertion, in particular the seductive dancing with half-naked models, the provocative gesture of touching his crotch – all these indicated his sexual/gender orientation: the form of his cross-dressing constructs the content of the cross-dressing, that is, a feminine man – one who is inclined toward homosexual love – epitomizing a form of male femininity. His elegant gait on the stage may represent a coming-out statement.

Leslie's red heels performance pertains to Susan Sontag's discussion of camp: grandiose, vulgar, connoting a sense of decadence and fetishism. As Sontag points out in her "Notes on 'Camp'" (1983), camp is a sensibility, a style, even a form of aestheticism; it belongs to an ornamental outlook on life, replete with vulgarity, excess, and self-degradation. Although Sontag's discussion focuses on Western art and literature between the seventeenth and eighteenth century, it provides a pivot to interrogate contemporary postmodern popular culture and performative art. For instance, Sontag argues that androgyny is the most prominent image in camp sensibility, it symbolizes a form of perfection and seduction that results from the blending of the sexes. Both feminine man and masculine woman, through their baroque and transgressive sexual performance, perfectly exemplify the unique camp sensibility, at the same time circumventing and supplementing the shortcomings of a mono sex; this androgynous state often involves mimicry, parody, and theatricality, and uses elaborate materials to construct a grandiose, vulgar, grotesque form of aesthetic style and sensibility, often with a tinge of parody and nobility taste (Sontag 1983: 103–119). Sontag's delineation illuminates Leslie's style on stage: glamorous and flamboyant clothing, exaggerated facial expression and body language of the actors, the voyeuristic camera angle, seductive lyrics and the singer's provocative tone, all contribute to creating a world of materialistic desires, an arena for feminine man to meander in and relish the articulation of sexual mobility. Leslie's performance thus demonstrated the multifarious possibilities of sexuality; at the same time, he was also challenging his audience's vision and senses. His camp style embodied the aristocratic aura associated with his original personality, and also included a sense of decadence and lasciviousness through a deliberate process of fabrication, thus bringing Sontag's discussion of androgyny into the realm of the sexuality of feminine man.

As Sontag points out at the end of her essay, camp culture is closely related to homosexuality. She is not arguing that all homosexuals have camp taste, but that most homosexuals embody the potentiality that the camp style displays (Sontag 1983: 118). Although Sontag does not explicitly state the centrality of queer in

camp culture, we can actually glean traces of discussion that hint at the inextricability of camp and queer. The connection between the grotesque in camp and queer indicates not a process of transformation but rather an intersection of styles. This exemplifies how camp culture already embodies queerness, especially when Sontag argues dandyism is a form of camp by citing the gay English writer Oscar Wilde as the prime example. Thus dandyism is an extravagant and stylish form of self-positioning, which foregrounds one's excessive sensitivity to their external outlook; and camp culture brings this nineteenth-century ornamental vogue into modern mass media, displaying a fetishist and vulgar tendency (Sontag 1983: 116–117). Seen from this perspective, the queerness in camp lies in its association with dandyism: the reflection of a modern dandy, the vulgar eroticism of the grandiose aristocrat, the gaudy attire of Leslie Cheung, the seductive and alluring looks of his gaze.

The Blurring of Reality and Stage, the Embodiment of Androgyny:
Farewell My Concubine

The way I act Chan Chen-pang in Rouge and Cheng Dieyi in Farewell My Concubine both contain traces of my acting method. I am me, every performance contains shadows of myself.

Chen Kaige's *Farewell My Concubine* represents Leslie's most substantial cross-dressing performance. Originally, the director intended John Lone, who has Peking Opera training and international recognition, to play the role of Cheng Dieyi; Leslie came in as a replacement when negotiations with John Lone failed. During this process of casting and negotiation, Leslie deliberately posed for a series of feminine photographs for *City Magazine* to demonstrate his plausibility and potentiality in acting a feminine role. Why did Leslie exert himself to fight for the role of Cheng Dieyi? What significance did Cheng Dieyi's cross-dressing performance have for him? From the perspective of a stage performer's self-projection, how did Leslie's cross-dressing subvert the latent homophobia within the film?

When critics discuss *Farewell My Concubine*, they tend to approach it through the prism of nationalism and cultural identity, and rarely touch upon the theme of homosexuality and cross-dressing. A critic has even argued the crux of the film is its instigation of a series of identifications highlighted through the character Consort Yu: Cheng Dieyi → Consort Yu → Peking Opera → Chinese culture → China, which signifies an empty, imaginary China. These interpretations lead to two pitfalls: first, critics have neglected the original novel from which the film is adapted – the book presents a more natural and open attitude toward homosexuality. Second, in the series of identifications delineated above, how should we situate and understand Leslie's subjectivity in his cross-dressing performance? As Leslie said, "The way I act Chan Chen-pang in *Rouge* and Cheng Dieyi in *Farewell My Concubine* both

contain traces of my acting method. I am me, every performance contains shadows of myself.” What Leslie meant is that the relationship between performer and character is a process of identification; in other words, in reading Leslie’s cross-dressing performance in the film, as Consort Yu, Yang Guifei on the Peking Opera stage, we must connect these performances to Leslie’s subjectivity as a cross-dresser. From his self-projection acting method, we can see how these feminine characters embody the performer’s gender identity.

Farewell My Concubine delineates the turbulent relationship a Dan actor, Cheng Dieyi, has with his fellow Jing performer Duan Xiaolou (played by Zhang Fengyi), echoing the political turmoil of contemporary China. Cheng perceives the stage as the center of his life, and even harbors a wish to be coupled with Duan Xiaolou, as in their roles on stage. Lamentably, Xiaolou is fixated on Juxian (played by Gong Li) and Cheng Dieyi’s unrequited love compels him to relish and cherish every transient moment on stage to immortalize the love legend between him and Duan Xiaolou. Seen from this perspective of homosexual love, we can see Dieyi’s Dan identity not merely as a theatrical role, but, more crucially, an embodiment of his own sexual orientation. Immersing himself in the roles of ancient female characters like Consort Yu, every cross-dressing performance of Cheng Dieyi epitomizes his/her devotion and love toward Duan Xiaolou; in the words of Yuan Shiqing (played by Ge You), Cheng Dieyi “is both masculine and feminine, and knows no boundaries between life and stage.” In fact, Dieyi’s obsession with the stage has reached the penultimate state of art – delirious, maniacal, and dedicating his whole life to the stage without the slightest tinge of regret. For Dieyi, there is no demarcation between life and stage: life is a stage, and the stage is his life. Because of this, Dieyi is heedless of the restrictions in reality, the drastic social changes, and the tumultuous political turmoil; and dedicates himself wholly to performing and perfecting the role of Consort Yu on stage, accompanying his beloved Xiang Yu (Duan Xiaolou). When this love becomes unattainable, Dieyi can only choose to commit suicide by sword, like Consort Yu, thus bringing his stage-life to its most consummating and perfect ending. Of course, Cheng Dieyi’s tragedy lies in his confusion between life and stage, and his inability to grasp the unreliability of love in the rushing tide of time, but his artistic triumph also lies in this obsession, a sublimation of art that fuses life and theater. Every gesture of cross-dressing represents his own identity, and his identity is also reflected in the fleeting images of Consort Yu and Yang Guifei on stage. Leslie’s lascivious performance – be it the insouciant glances, the delicate tenderness in his body movement, or melancholic meditation – brings to life the agitated emotions of these female characters, and a self-projection that blurs the boundaries between life and stage. We, as the audience, are seeing Cheng Dieyi’s cross-dressing performance, and at the same time also bearing witness to Leslie’s embodiment of a different sexuality. Cheng Dieyi and Leslie fuse into one organic whole: it seems as if Leslie is destined to be Dieyi, and Dieyi is rejuvenated through Leslie. Lillian Lee once said that she had written two characters exclusively for Leslie, one of them is Chan Chen-pang in *Rouge*, the other Cheng Dieyi in *Farewell My*

Concubine. This tailor-made character image further exemplifies Cheng-Dieyi-and-Leslie-Cheung as an inextricable artistic creation. Chen Kaige also said there was no other actor who could play the role of Cheng Dieyi except Leslie Cheung. So, the “blurring of life and stage and the attainment of androgyny” is not only a reflection of Cheng Dieyi’s life, it also underscores the relationship with Leslie as a mirror image, and embodies the most sublime form of artistic accomplishment.

Leslie confessed in an interview in Stanley Kwan’s *Yang ± Yin: Gender in Chinese Cinema* (1996) that he embodies a feminine and narcissist character, that one of his distinguishing characteristics is his sensitivity, in particular a sensitivity towards love, and that the audience recognizes his delicate and tender qualities. Stanley Kwan responded by posing an important reflection: in Leslie’s cross-dressing films, do these cross-dressing characters effectuate Leslie; or does Leslie effectuate these cross-dressing characters? This dialogue between Leslie and Stanley perchance connotes the inextricability and blurring of life and stage. In fact, if Leslie had not been cast, had John Lone been cast instead, I believe that the on-stage and off-stage cross-dressing performances in *Farewell My Concubine* would not have been so tenderly touching. Leslie’s lugubrious looks, his lingering dedication to love, and his demure tenderness cannot be articulated by an actor who does not identify with feminine traits; in other words, it is Leslie’s identification with a feminine identity that allows him to articulate his feminine qualities through his cross-dressing performance. The relationship between the two is akin to two sides of the same coin, the cross-dresser and the character are integrated as a whole, like a bright reflection in a mirror, illuminating each other.

Yet, interestingly, the liberal and humane attitude toward homosexuality in Lillian Lee’s original novel is radically transformed in Chen Kaige’s adaptation into an extreme form of homophobia, distorting the independence and freedom of choice in homosexual relationships. I have posed this question to Leslie in person: as a man who is keen to traverse the boundaries of sexuality, how does he confront the film’s homophobia? Leslie said he understood Chen Kaige’s political background and market pressure; he felt that, as an actor, the most important thing was to utilize his personal subjectivity to materialize Cheng Dieyi’s complicated personality. Within the accepted parameters of the film, he presented Dieyi’s unwavering homosexual love in the most delicate and poignant manner to the audience. Leslie also pointed out that the ending of the film was conceived out of a joint creative effort with Zhang Fengyi. As the plot development in the film differs saliently from that of the novel, they thought the focus should be on the changing relationship between the two protagonists, and that Dieyi’s obsessive love for Xiaolou must end and subliminate as death in order for it to become heart-rending for the audience. Unfortunately, Chen Kaige did not want to expatiate upon the relationship between the two men, and included Gong Li to counterbalance the homosexual plot. Leslie even reckoned if the film could have remained faithful to the original novel and elevated the homosexual element, it could have become a more remarkable queer film than *Happy Together*, which he acted in a few years later. This allows us to realize how

Leslie's cross-dressing performance and his perspicacious interpretation of Cheng Dieyi subverted the latent homophobia of the film. We only have to look at Leslie's individual performance within the film to discern his self-performativity on stage. Luckily, the young Cheng Dieyi, who suffers a symbolic castration and sexual distortion in the earlier part of the film, is played by a child actor, which allows Leslie's performance to exist independently beyond the director's homophobia, especially in the way Leslie brings to life Cheng Dieyi's steadfast persistence in pursuing his homosexual love. Thus Leslie's cross-dressing performance creates a subversiveness, which emblemizes an irony to the film/director.

The Legendary Iridescence and Melodramatic Life of Anita Mui

Anita Mui is a legendary woman, whose legendary status is inextricably linked to her early experience of being a destitute child singer, her omnifarious image throughout her artistic career, and her drawn-out struggle against illness. Both her on-screen and off-screen personae were associated with chivalric tenacity and effeminate tenderness, endowing her with an androgynous aura. On stage she can be the meandering singing Bad Girl, Black Widow, Capone Girl, Cleopatra, and elegant gentlewoman; her cinematic image comprises a wide range of characters – female ghost, chivalric knight, and male impersonator. Ever since she was young, she was a forerunner of the fashion vogue, displaying a dazzling array of costumes (sharp lounge suit, military costume, *qipao*, miniskirt), heavy-metal accessories and make-up; but always radiating a sense of enthralling aloofness.

While there are multiple pivots and perspectives from which to explore the complexity of Anita Mui, in this section I aim to limit my discussion to her cross-dressing performance and queer image in a variety of genre films, such as the masculine and militant image in *Kawashima Yoshiko* and *A Better Tomorrow 3: Love & Death in Saigon* (Tsui Hark, 1989), and the figure of the cross-dresser in *Wu Yen*. We will look into the ways Anita employs a camp, queer body and performativity to construct a multilayered space which allows the audience to imagine the mobile flows of desire within and beyond the screen.

Female Masculinity: Effeminate Chivalry

When a female impersonates as a male, she is simultaneously not male and male, and at the same time not female and female, traversing and maneuvering between the endless possibilities in the mutation of sexuality. When Rebecca Bell-Metereau explicated male impersonation in *Hollywood Androgyny* (1993), she used Garbo as an example of how an actress can embody two different sexual modes: feminine

male and masculine female. These androgynous modes are not performed by two actors, but stem from an actress's self-fissuring performance. It is a form of magical transformative power that functions through the deployment of gesture, voice and, deportment, so that when an actress assumes male attire a tough, alluring aura is radiated; and when she is seen in female attire she is characterized by a graceful and placid litheness. This flexible duality allowed Anita to maneuver around, across and through dalliance and relationships between male and female within and beyond the camera (Bell-Metereau 1993: 74–75). Her films best exemplify this duality of androgyny; in situating the characters within the diegesis of a film, she could always infuse her own charisma into the roles. From the macho-suit look in *A Better Tomorrow 3* to the ancient chivalric figure in *The Magic Crane* (Benny Chan, 1993), she always embodied this effeminate chivalry, where she used her superb martial prowess and deft abilities to fight her way to safety alongside actors like Chow Yun-fat and Tony Leung Chiu-wai.

For instance, in *A Better Tomorrow 3*, Anita plays the role of a gangster who adopts a masculine name "Chau Yingjie," which already creates a misrecognition of her sexual identity before her appearance; after that, she appears in a white overcoat, brandishing two guns in her hands and maneuvering her way decisively amidst the blazing fire of the Vietnamese forces. Set against the exquisite product design of William Chang and through the hero-building camera lens of Tsui Hark, Anita's heroic image overshadows that of Chow Yun-fat. The film, which served as a sort of prequel to the Mark Gor legend, also immortalized Anita: the heroic endeavor of Mark Gor is actually inspired by a woman he met in an early phase in his life. If Chow Yun-fat's Mark Gor figure comes to represent a "Great Brother" image in the realm of Hong Kong action cinema, then the audacious Anita epitomizes a "Great Sister" image, to the extent that it is difficult to envisage another actress being able to portray this hero who is well aware of the debasement of the world yet remains steadfastly courageous at heart.

In *The Magic Crane*, Anita plays the role of an ill-fated princess, and consequently impersonates as a male and enters the *jianghu* beleaguered by rancor and intrigues between different families and martial arts factions. Although the film is adapted from a *wuxia* novel, the plot is weak and fraught with inconsistencies and contradictions; luckily the scriptwriter Tsui Hark and director Benny Chan are astute enough to utilize Anita's androgynous image to create affecting visual aesthetics. For instance, when Anita descends from the sky in the magic crane, with her white robe dancing and gliding in the wind, the use of slow motion and editing fleetingly captures her lissom figure. At the same time, the use of close-ups foregrounds the charmingly feminine features of Anita's face, like her full lips, her enticing departing glances. These fluidly captivating scenes create an elegant sense of otherworldliness, highlighting that Anita's chivalric image embodies both the masculine and feminine body, an instance of the perfect blending of the masculine and the feminine which bewitches the male protagonist (played by Tony Leung) and confounds the audience beyond the screen.

The Militant Lady and Transvestite Lady

For those who grew up with Anita's music, her remarkable cross-dressing performances in various music videos will never be forgotten. However, the most remarkable example of her versatility in ever-changing costumes is her performance in Eddie Fong's *Kawashima Yoshiko*. Born as the fourteenth daughter to Prince Su in the late Qing dynasty and originally named Aisin Gioro Xianyu, the historical Yoshiko Kawashima is a legendary figure: she was sent to Japan to receive military training at the age of six and changed her name to Yoshiko. Thereafter she cross-dressed as a male spy and was involved in political events like the Manchurian Incident and the establishment of the Manchukuo, with her life situation fluctuating concurrently with the political torrent of her era, shrouded in endless adventures and enigmas. In 1948 she was executed as a traitor; however, speculations and uncertainties concerning her alleged death persist. Casting Anita, who experienced similar shifting tides of fortune in life, as such a character naturally inspired a more poignant significance and implications. In fact, the director, Eddie Fong, and scriptwriter, Lillian Lee, specifically designed several outfits for Anita to befit the dazzling variety of the names and pseudonyms she bears in the film – the names Aisin Gioro and Yoshiko Kawashima, and pseudonyms like Jin Bihui and Yue Ming: from *kimono*, western suit, and wedding dress to military uniform, *qipao*, and mandarin jacket, all these converge to foreground her dazzling, shifting, ambivalent identity between a Manchu, Chinese, Japanese, male, female, spy, mistress, and commander. Of course, these ever-changing identities play an important role in the diegesis of the film to delineate the tragic story of Yoshiko's ultimately unsuccessful attempt to use her female identity and power to navigate through the political turmoil dominated by powerful males. Beyond the diegesis of the film, Anita's cross-dressing performances, which can dramatically shift from a noble lasciviousness to a commander of imposing decisiveness, naturally attracted audiences' gazes and provoked their desires. In short, Anita in *Kawashima Yoshiko* epitomized a dazzling and multifarious possibility of the intersection of masculinity and femininity. Yet despite this rich visual imagery and cross-dressing performance, it is difficult to mask the banality of the script and the film's fragmented nature; in a way this is similar to Anita or Yoshiko under the camera: despite the visual splendor of her attire, the character remains insipid, empty, and shallow. For instance, apart from functioning as a mere showcase, the intention and emotions behind each cross-dressing act remains unclear, thus rendering the character lifeless; putting aside Anita's personal charismatic performance, the loose structure of the film and its vague focus make it difficult for audiences to ascertain the director and scriptwriter's understanding of this complex historical figure. These defects also foreground a monotonous form of exoticization and flamboyance, concomitantly exposing the film's inability to explore and probe the complex connection between sexuality and politics. However, of all Anita's cross-dressing acts, the most contentious one, in terms of sexual politics, is her cross-dressing in military uniform. The image of

a dominant female military officer in a world of male hegemony offers us a glimpse of how an actress can, through her personal charisma and acting skills, subvert male authority within the film and transcend the limitation of the script to project a particular version of her own subjectivity on screen.

The famous English film scholar Stella Bruzzi (1997) argues that, historically, when women go to the frontline in military uniform, it not only reflects the disorderly and chaotic nature of the period, but also represents an attempt by women to use cross-dressing as a tactic to advocate subversion and revolution in tandem with constructing a new world structure and sexual order that challenge the hegemonic male presence in the military sphere. Furthermore, as a symbol of order, system, and hierarchy, military uniform represents masculinity, bureaucracy, conservatism, and subservience; but, once it is assumed by females, it comes to connote a sense of irony, subversion, and intrusion. In other words, the female body transforms the meaning of the military uniform and endows it with a degree of ambivalence as the political dimension inherent in the notion of the military is tinged with the idea of sexual politics elucidating how the female body under the military uniform resembles a reversal and subversion (Bruzzi 1997: 148–150). Bell-Metereau also points out, in terms of its historical and cultural significance, military uniform represents conquer and conquest, which connotes sexual violence, torture, and manslaughter; yet at the same time, it also highlights patriotism and contribution to one's nation. Therefore, it is more congenial for particular types of female cross-dresser to adopt military uniform: those with an aloof aura, tough figure lines, and an indifference to pain and human suffering; in contradistinction, a female who is too feminine and delicate, with a weak figure, will be incapable of carrying off the deportment required to bear convincingly a military uniform (Bell-Metereau 1993: 108–109). Actually, the “feminine military uniform” is also the most pertinent performance of androgyny: when the female body is enclosed within the masculine attire of the military uniform, it diffuses a special aura of devilish seductiveness; so, as a female military commander and female spy, Yoshiko is dubbed the “Eastern Female Devil”; the pertinence of this label is also reflected in the absurd and mysterious rumors that surround her. The military uniform functions as a mask, it is a masquerade and also a metaphor, shrouding the “truth” behind the mask in an endless enigma. Furthermore, a female exercising military power inspires awe and, at the same time, a desire to subjugate her, thus embodying a very contradictory sexual form: her “virility” arouses exaltation but also poses a threat, so seducing her becomes an enthralling yet dangerous game. Anita's Yoshiko marked an exceptional landmark in the history of Hong Kong cinema for her ability to tease all these vivid and complex associations out of the image of military uniform. In the film, Anita, in the identity of Jin Bihui, intervenes in the scheming political intrigues between the opposing forces, and all of her presences are marked by a sense of imposing manner and cool-headed composure. For her, the “military uniform” is a tool and mask to manipulate others and further her political aims, so she will seduce the Empress Jung (played by Idy Chan Yuk-lin) in her male attire; but when

she meets the man she fancies (played by Andy Lau), she will display a radically different form of femininity. Thus, her different outfits mark a clear demarcation between the battlefields of warfare and love. Male attire (which includes the military uniform, suit, and mandarin overcoat) is an instrument for her to gain distinction in the battlefield and further her political ends, whereas female attire (such as the *qipao*, evening dress, *kimono*, and wedding dress) are tools to manipulate men; unfortunately both means fail her: the Yoshiko who successfully alternates between masculine and feminine identity is ultimately, a pawn beguiled by monarchy and patriarchy; this is the inexorable fate that Yoshiko, despite her shrewdness and intelligence, cannot escape from. This is the predetermined course of event that the historical and filmic Yoshiko cannot overturn, yet Anita's personal performance brings in a transformative aura to the role: all the scenes and shots that portray her shimmer with dazzling brilliance and endow the character with a profound depth.

Anita's military uniform does not only demonstrate the possibility of androgyny, but also creates a queer landscape of "male-male" and "female-female" relationships – when "she" confronts Hung (played by Derek Yee) or Commander Tanaka Takayoshi (played by Patrick Tse Yin), it represents a struggle between two men in terms of political and sexual power; when "she" lingers on the bed with Empress Jung, it represents a sexual intimacy between two women – this endless transformation in attires reflects the corporeal permeability between masculinity and femininity, and also the two-way flow of sexuality. Yoshiko's sexuality can vary according to different situations, thus the permeability between male and female seems to resemble a magic trick which regulates her own body and manipulate others, exemplifying what Bruzzi articulates as the "mise-en-scène of desire": the allocation, amplification and magnification of "desire" as the locus of the screen, which guides audiences to reflect and search for one's own position and angle of identification. What the notion of "androgyny" encompasses is a state of ambivalence, ambiguity, and opaqueness, which differs saliently from a traditional full cross-dresser, as there is no inclination for one sex to totally dominate over the other. This allows us to contemplate the relationship between the two sexes, how it can be both concrete and abstract, corporeal and imaginary, a body and also a metaphor, creating an indecisiveness in our gaze (Bell-Metereau 1993: 175–176). As an object of desire, Anita embodies a compelling subjectivity, both within and beyond the screen. In other words, she is not a mere passive object of gaze for the characters and the audiences, but an active agent who uses her mixed form of sexual representation to stimulate and allure characters and audiences into the domain of desire, demonstrating the myriad flows of desire and the indefinite permeability between sexuality, and also attesting to the most enigmatic power of androgyny.

From a female chivalric figure to a militant lady, Anita's sexual representation traverses the realm of masculinity and femininity, but her performance in *Wu Yen* marks an outright cross-dressing, no longer "a female impersonating a male" but "performing as a man." *Wu Yen* – a collaborative effort of Johnnie To and Wai Ka-fai which merges the *wuxia*, *qixu*, and comedy genre – mocks and subverts the

traditional notion of cross-dressing. Anita plays the male lead role of Emperor Qi instead of Wu Yen, and flirts and banters with the female protagonists, emblemizing a form of subversive and enigmatic romantic and sexual landscape. The film deliberately uses an “all-female” cast, with Sammi Cheng and Cecilia Cheung cast as Wu Yen and Yinchun/Enchantress respectively, constructing a love-triangle relationship between these three women. The design and casting of the characters already indicate a divergence from the framework of this traditional folklore; also, by endowing the characters with a gender/sexual fluidity, the film creates a boundless and mobile flow of sexuality between all sexes. As Johnnie To stated in an interview with *Film Biweekly*, the concept of *Wu Yen* came from old Mandarin films and Cantonese Opera cinema, and also the cross-dressing image of Yam Kim-fai: “Films with cross-dressing elements have an interesting point, in that the film represents an all-female world, for instance, Yam also plays the male role; it is a world from which men have to evacuate.” Also, To emphasizes, as *Wu Yen* is a romantic comedy, casting an actor as the lewd Emperor Qi may not seem to be that humorous; on the contrary, casting an actress as a lascivious male may create an additional and unexpected comedic effect. To’s remarks highlight three important ideas: first, although *Wu Yen* subverts the traditional framework of the story (for instance, the emphasis on the formal rigor of *qixu* and the grotesque facial disfigurement of Wu Yen) and transforms it into a modern vernacular comedy, in essence it retains the aesthetics of the cross-dressing performance in Cantonese Opera, especially as the casting of females as both male and female leading roles evokes the glamor of “women films.” Second, casting a woman to act the role of an unfavorable character like Emperor Qi helps to avert audiences’ aversion and distaste. When the lewdness and ineptitude of this “man” is performed by a charming actress, even if her performance is too exaggerated, it achieves a comical effect but not repugnance or repulsion. However, if it is performed by a real/straight man, it is difficult to maintain this nuanced balance and may accrue the problem of overacting. Third, the idea of “woman being a man” must appear in the form of a comedy for it to be accepted; seen from this perspective, comedy is also a “mask,” a humorous and light-hearted way to resolve the subversiveness and threat of “female impersonating a male” and render it approachable and acceptable to both a male and female audience.

As Alice A. Kuzniar, a scholar who specializes in gender theory in cinema, points out, the aim of transvestite comedy lies not in emphasizing sexual differences and their constructed cultural significance; instead, through exercising the choice of a non-traditional alternative form of desire, transvestite comedy presents an attempt to highlight the interfusion and indeterminacy of the sexes and blur the distinction between homosexuality and heterosexuality; and capitalizing upon the deception and misrecognition then the camouflage entails, conceals the latent queer imagination (Kuzniar 2000: 22). In Johnnie To and Wai Ka-fai’s *Wu Yen*, there are three distinctive features of their fantastical and absurd interchange of male and female impersonation. First, it highlights Anita’s personal impersonating skills. Her lithe figure and clear facial features render her strikingly effective in impersonating as a male; at times when she plays the role of ancient emperor she is able to perform it

with a sense of grandeur and grace. Emperor Qi is not a virtuous emperor but an inept one, which renders his character unlikeable in essence; but Anita is able, through the use of comical expressions, exaggerated physical gestures, and the delivery of her lines in a childish tone, to attune to the ambience of the comedy, bringing to life Emperor Qi's lewdness and prurience. As she stated, in performing the role of Emperor Qi, she consulted and referred to the comical styles of preceding actors such as Leung Sing-bor, Sun Ma Sze Tsang, and Deng Jichen. In particular Deng's version, in which he first acts a woman then acts as a man, gave her great inspiration. In my view, Anita's comical cross-dressing performance does not only encompass Leung's ludicrous and giddy style and Sun Ma Sze Tsang and Deng's mimicry of working-class people's gestures, but also demonstrates the aura of the classic "female *man mou sang*" (the scholar-warrior in Cantonese Opera), Yam Kim-fai. For instance, Anita's hunched gait, which signifies the character's prankish tendency to evade responsibilities, and her exaggerated expression of astonishment, both stem from Yam's signature style which connotes a sense of gentility and elegance, thus avoiding the vulgarity that could arise if it was performed by a real/straight man. Also, to complement Anita's impersonation, all the male government officials and military commanders revolving around Emperor Qi are represented as "cissies" in terms of their deportment, speech, and gestures. Their awkward incompetence serves as a foil to the "masculine" image of Anita performing the role of Emperor Qi. If the director had employed a group of macho actors instead, it would have been difficult for Anita to manifest her "masculinity," thus diminishing the comic effect of the scenes and characterization. The second point concerns the complicated sexual mis-identification within the film. For instance, despite the fluidity in shifting his/her gender/sexual identity, the "enchantress" is actually a man! And the purpose of "his" scheme of transforming into Yinchun to seduce Emperor Qi is to gain the love of Wu Yen. Wu Yen (played by Sammi Cheng) throughout most of the film remains tomboyish in terms of her attire, de-emphasizing her femininity and reinforcing her boorish behavior. Her ugliness lies in her lack of femininity; therefore, while she remains invincible on the battlefield, she suffers from endless setbacks in the pursuit of love. All these female images contravene traditional characterization in *qixu*, and also create an ambiguous gender/sexual identity: a woman can suddenly transform into a man, and a man may be in fact a woman. At the same time, these permutations between different gender/sexual identities construct a queer eroticism: when Cecilia Cheung transforms into a man and falls in love with Wu Yen, and when Cecilia reverts back to a woman to embrace Emperor Qi who is played by the actress Anita Mui, do all these suggest a latent homoerotic desire in these apparent heterosexual courtships? As the "enchantress" who can transform into a man or woman at will, does his/her desire for both Emperor Qi and Wu Yen signify homosexuality, heterosexuality, or bisexuality? Furthermore, the latter part of the film takes up theme of "double cross-dressing" and sexual misrecognition. In his attempt to expose the real identity of the "enchantress," Emperor Qi "impersonates a female" (the process of "double cross-dressing" can gleaned from the way that Anita "returns" to feminine dress) and

becomes the “Northern Concubine;” in a bizarre turn of events, the traitor Ng Hei (played by Raymond Wong Ho-yin) falls for this “Northern Concubine” and instigates a coup in an attempt to set “her” free and win “her” favor. Thus the scenes in which the dress-clad Emperor Qi and Ng Hei engage in a ludicrous romance seem to borrow the female body of Anita Mui to display subtly a form of homosexual relationship which makes the audience uncertain as to laugh or cry in response, and also renders the demarcation between homosexuality and heterosexuality ambiguous. Kuzniar argues that the purpose of double cross-dressing is to create queer pairings, by casting actress into male roles and “re-transforming” them into women within the film through cross-dressing; it is a form of manipulation of double identity and double sexuality. This process of “double cross-dressing” creates a form of misrecognition which allows queer desires to be articulated. Yet the more crucial point is: how do the audiences see this? What can they see? When a double cross-dresser interacts with characters of the two sexes, the hetero/homo/bisexual relationships become myriad and fluid. Furthermore, it also demonstrates the inextricability between “mask” and “desire,” as the essence of “love” is to “masquerade” which serves as the precondition of mutual attraction; to avoid delusion one must never denude the façade of such masquerades (Kuzniar 2000: 45–46). *Wu Yen*’s cross-dressing undertaking also encompasses these queer aspects, which testifies to the creativity of Johnnie To and Wai Ka-fai to utilize the complex relationship and identities of three protagonists – “the Beauty, the Ugly Woman, and the Inept Emperor” – to explore the issue of cross-dressing and the myriad and ceaseless flows of multiple sexual identities and queer desires. Yet, once sexual difference is fixated and the “masquerade” is exposed, everything reverts to the established order and hierarchy. Therefore, the ending of *Wu Yen* is inevitably conservative: when the originally sexually ambivalent “enchantress” fixes her sexual identity due to her pregnancy, her sexual duality becomes monotonous, and her sexual fluidity becomes congealed. In a similar vein, when the true identity of the “Northern Concubine” is revealed and the heartbroken Ng Hei is enlisted into the army, everything reverts back to the polygamous and heterosexual mode. These are fetters which a male director and scriptwriter are unable to break.

Conclusion

An artist has to be coquettish, charming, chic, haughty, and, both masculine and feminine, in order to be recognized as successful.

Leslie Cheung once said this in a concert. It can be read as Leslie’s embodiment of femininity within a male body and his androgyny; more importantly, it reflects his confidence and affirmation of his feminine qualities. Dyer, in his magnum opus *Stars* (2004), borrows Plato’s dictum of “life as theater and theater as life” to delineate the

painstaking process of the construction of stars – as ordinary people, stars have similar attributes to us. Stars are real people, but through their multifarious images on screen they experience the vicissitudes of life. When these two forms of life interact, their talent and flair allow the stars to diffuse their aura on screen, and the characters and events within the films seem to enrich the life experiences of the stars, so that they can transcend their original status as ordinary people. Thus we as audiences are no longer able to distinguish the boundaries between “actor” and “character,” the “stage” becomes part of the stars’ existences, through a process of constructing, performing, and gradually evolving as “being” (Dyer 2004: 20–21). The point of citing Dyer’s theory is to use it as a pivot to explore the nature of Leslie and Anita’s star image, particularly when the two actors come close to the type which Dyer delineates as “character acting,” namely how the two can use their charismatic characters to personalize the characters within the films as part of their performative aesthetics. Of course this logic does not invalidate how certain directors or scriptwriters create tailor-made androgynous characters for the two based on their distinctive characteristics and life experiences. These characters have formed an inextricable reflective connection to Leslie and Anita, to the extent that we can no longer distinguish whether he/she is realizing these characters or these characters are endowing their star images with an extra level of significance? But we can decisively say that Leslie and Anita’s cinematic aura and artistic talents can surpass the constraints of the movie camera and written scripts, and turn the banal into the miraculous through their extraordinary star charisma.

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Cooling Faye Wong

A Cosmopolitical Intervention

Kin-Yan Szeto

An icon of the Chinese film and music industries, Faye Wong is often considered a cultural symbol of coolness. The private and public discourses regarding her stardom have characterized her as independent, unconventional, and contentious. Overshadowed by her success as a popular singer-songwriter, Faye Wong the film star has received little attention. As a cultural icon, Wong's screen personae simultaneously promote conservative values and challenge conventional narratives of femininity. This contradiction between mainstream and marginal allows me to construct alternative readings of her characters and narratives. As a pop star, Faye Wong is imbricated with social meaning and ideologies, gender politics and history since the 1990s. As an actress, she is most familiar to film critics around the world as the actress in *Chungking Express* (Wong Kar-wai, 1994) and *2046* (Wong Kar-wai, 2004). By examining Faye Wong's screen personae, including those in Wong Kar-wai's films, I will present a cosmopolitical view of Hong Kong cinema in its pre-and post-1997 contexts.

Faye Wong has become a cultural icon of coolness hugely popular in mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, Japan, and Sinophone communities around the world. Jeroen de Kloet notes that Faye Wong's "strength lies in her cosmopolitan [...] ambiguity" (2005: 660). Instead of cosmopolitanism, I propose a cosmopolitical perspective to re-contextualize her stardom, particularly in films made by Wong Kar-wai. A cosmopolitical perspective is very different from cosmopolitanism. As I have argued in another context, an individual may cross national borders or live in a multicultural metropolis such as Hong Kong or Tokyo without necessarily being politicized about it (Szeto 2010: 417). A cosmopolitical

perspective, as I have demonstrated in *The Martial Arts Cinema of the Chinese Diaspora*, arises when subjects “experience multiple dislocations through globalism, colonialism, and histories of diaspora and learn to navigate their temporal, spatial, and historical contradictions, surviving and achieving their goals” (Szeto 2011: 6). Such a perspective “emerge[s] from experience of displacement from their native homeland” and enables one to “develop and act in an increasingly transnational environment of media production, distribution, and consumption” (Szeto 2011: 7). This is an extension of James Clifford’s idea that a “cosmopolitical” perspective is one in which “[i]dentity is also, inescapably, about displacement and relocation, the experience of sustaining and mediating complex affiliations, multiple attachments” (1998: 368–9).

In analyzing the sped-up images and non-linear narrative in Wong Kar-wai’s films, Ackbar Abbas uses the concept of “disappearance” to discuss these strategies for critiquing the colonial gaze (1997: 16–47). The culture and aesthetics of disappearance address to a certain degree Wong Kar-wai’s politics of resistance in a colonial context, but do not acknowledge the emergence of a cosmopolitical intervention in a neocolonial and post-1997 environment. A cosmopolitical intervention is a form of political agency and perspective that results from cross-cultural as well as ideological engagements and geopolitical displacements that challenge, in this case, Eastern and Western hegemonic power structures. Indeed, cultural hegemony can take the form not only of British imperialism/colonialism and American cultural hegemony, but also Chinese nationalism and national modernities.

As a star inheriting the legacy of Hong Kong entertainment industry since the 1990s, Faye Wong’s popularity interfaces with her brand of coolness. Faye Wong’s displacements from her homeland, mainland China, and as a diasporic subject in Hong Kong, together with her transnational star personae of coolness, are the basis of the emergence of a cosmopolitical intervention. In this chapter, I will investigate how Wong Kar-wai deploys Faye Wong’s stardom to explore further his recurring themes of memory and desire. Known for his ability to transcend stylistic boundaries, the Shanghai born Hong Kong director Wong Kar-wai has built a diverse oeuvre that traverses various cultures, borders, and displacements. By incorporating Faye Wong’s distinct cool persona together with her pop star status, Wong Kar-wai invokes a cosmopolitical intervention into Hong Kong screenscapes. Expanding on Arjun Appadurai’s notion of “-scapes,” Esther M.K. Cheung, Gina Marchetti, and Tan See Kam use “screenscapes” to describe Hong Kong’s “rich screen culture beyond the confines of the local, commercial film industry, making its connections to world film/screen culture clear” (2011: 1). By examining Faye Wong’s screen personae, I will look at how her alternative femininity disrupts the trajectory of heterosexual romance and calls attention to a cosmopolitical dimension in Hong Kong’s rich screen cultures.

Star of Coolness

Faye Wong is commonly known as a cultural icon of coolness. She is generally referred to as a diva – which means “Heavenly Queen” in Chinese – and is famous in Sinophone communities around the world, in Japan, and to a certain extent in the West. As a diva of Chinese popular music, she was interviewed by CNN as early as in 1998, reflecting her significance in transnational popular culture. Faye Wong’s successful blend of world pop music includes Cantopop, Mandapop, Chinese rock, American blues and soul, Björk, The Cranberries, The Cocteau Twins, etc. Born in Beijing, she started her career in Hong Kong and rose to fame in early 1990s. According to Guinness World Records, as of March 2000 her albums had sold 9.7 million copies in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Japan, giving her the title of “Best Selling Cantopop Female Artist.” She sings in both Cantonese and Mandarin and has released songs in Japanese and English (such as the *Final Fantasy VIII* theme “Eyes on Me”). At the beginning of 1998, Wong was invited to sing a duet “Meet in ’98” with Na Ying, a noticeable mainland pop singer, at the CCTV Spring Festival Gala. This has shown Wong’s pop star standing in China. In contrast to Na Ying, who is generally considered a mainland singer, Wong thrives through the transnational reach of Hong Kong music and film industries, and has become an immensely popular icon beyond both the mainland and Hong Kong.

Faye Wong’s screen personae navigate her coolness and cultural legacy as a pop star since the 1990s. As a female star personifying distinct subjectivity and active desire, Faye Wong reflects the cultural logic of what Zhang Luxin and others describe as “cool” (Zhang, Meng and Tang 2004:3–12). Coolness is closely associated with popular culture as the public consumes individuality and uniqueness in the wake of commercialization. In a consumer culture and society, coolness becomes an analytical framework to reflect on how consumers cope with the rapid economic and social changes in a period of intense globalization. Applied to the study of popular culture such as film, coolness offers a unique insight into how audiences construct cultural and sociopolitical meanings behind the personal and collective consumption of stars. Based on Thomas Frank’s argument that the conquest of coolness and counterculture is at the heart of contemporary capitalism, Jim McGuigan argues that “cool capitalism” incorporates disaffection into capitalism itself, absorbing rebellion and thereby neutralizing opposition to the present system of culture and society (2009: 1–8).

In interpreting Faye Wong’s coolness, some audiences see her gender neutrality or androgyny as part of “her childlike, autonomous, and cool star persona” (Groenewegen 2009: 253). For others, “[d]efiantly seeking love, professional success and artistic satisfaction, Faye’s persona seems to resonate with the ‘limitless desires’ of young Chinese women” (Fung and Curtin 2002: 283). These multiple possible interpretations suggest that Wong plays the game in the commercialized

entertainment industry, by allowing coolness to be a tool of novelty, elusiveness and assimilation. As Fung and Curtin summarize it, "The image of a desiring, adventurous and provocative Faye is acceptable because she remains committed to a romantic vision of love and family. She is at once a bohemian, a professional and a traditional woman. What reconciles these seemingly contradictory qualities is her explicit subjectivity, her active desire" (2002:283).

Undeniably, stardom is a social sign for personal and collective consumption that has economic value for both mainstream audiences and marginal groups. Two songs that establish Faye Wong's pop star status are "Fragile Woman" (1992) and "No Regrets" (1993). She is marketed as a devoted partner who is at the same time independent, allowing her alternative femininity to be assimilated into the mainstream paternal ideology about love, passion, and womanhood. Richard Dyer indicates that "production and consumption are differently determining forces in the creation of stars [...] that are always mediated by and in ideology" (1998: 20). Wong's star personae mask such contradictions within and between mainstream ideologies as her cool, charismatic appeal offers "a value, order or stability to counterpoise" the "instabilities, ambiguities and contradictions in the culture (which are reproduced in the actual practice of making films, and film stars)" (Dyer 1998: 31).

Through musicianship, Faye Wong has established herself as a cool pop idol. She is considered original and has rejected the conventional Cantopop by writing her songs and lyrics. In addition, she has drawn on inspirations from a wide range of resources, particularly Beijing rock music. In fact, both rock and pop music have become part of urban youth culture in the mainland and Hong Kong. In defining the rock/pop distinction, David Stokes notes in the public discourse among Chinese youth, rock "has greater capacity for artistic statement and self-expression vis-à-vis other popular music forms" while pop is a "money-making tool" and is "enjoyed by everyone within a definite time span" (2004: 41–42). Blending rock and pop approaches, Faye Wong has established her distinct artistic and cultural values in popular music. Her collaborations with the mainland rock artist Dou Wei and producer Zhang Yadong have created the golden era of her music career in the 1990s. During this time, Dou was a strong influence on Wong's music as their personal relationship as partners continued to blossom. The most apparent examples are "Oath," co-written by Dou and Wong from album *Random Thoughts*, and "Exit" and "Please Myself," written by Wong and arranged by Dou, from album *Please Myself*, all released in 1994.

With economic openness and the radical commercialization of music industry in the mid-1990s, mainland China sees an import of pop music from Hong Kong and Taiwan. Faye Wong exemplifies the crossover of urban and youth cultures in the mainland and Hong Kong. Being seen as "a modern urban girl who is in control of her life," Faye Wong appeals to both girls and boys in both Hong Kong and the Chinese diasporic communities (Kloet 2010: 154). Supported by well-resourced record companies such as Cinepoly and EMI, she represents a trajectory of cross-cultural exchange between the mainland and the Chinese diaspora during the 1990s.

Unlike her contemporaries such as Cass Phang who is commonly known for mostly only performing pop music, Faye Wong remakes herself into a cultural icon through both music and film. During the heyday of Hong Kong cinema in 1990s, it was extremely common for leading Hong Kong singers such as Anita Mui, Leslie Cheung, Faye Wong, or the so-called “Four Heavenly Kings” of Cantopop (Jacky Cheung, Andy Lau, Leon Lai, and Aaron Kwok) to act in films. As a pop star, Faye Wong developed a distinct personality and lasting persona through musicianship. Like Anita Mui, she rose to be a cultural icon of coolness because of her original visual and musical styles. Both Mui and Wong had a consistent numbers of albums that convey their unique cultural values, beliefs, attitudes, and ideas that were further sustained by institutional support such as concerts, radio, TV shows, commercials, magazines, etc. They both acted in films that further marketed their cultural values as cultural icons. Mui was “Hong Kong-born and ethnically Chinese, her ‘localness’ and rise to fame from humble origins were also part of her appeal” (Witzleben 1999: 246). In fact, she was remembered as an iconic “Daughter of Hong Kong” at the Anita Mui Memorial Concert in 2013. This same label can never be attributed to the Beijing-born Faye Wong. According to J. Lawrence Witzleben, during the 1980s and 1990s, “Hong Kong popular music fans demonstrate an overwhelming preference for their own indigenous or domesticated heroes and heroines rather than imported ones, be they Chinese or Western (1999: 244). In fact, Faye Wong has gone through a process of domestication as an “indigenous” Hong Kong star. Instead of exemplifying a “localism” in Hong Kong’s glocal culture, Faye Wong’s long-term connections with both Beijing rock music scene and Hong Kong’s commercial music industry not only show her cross-cultural approach to mainstream Cantopop and alternative music, but also her multifaceted identities that can never be completely assimilated as either Hong Kong or mainland Chinese.

Since the 1990s, Wong has established her brand of coolness as an aesthetic of alternative music, attitude, appearance, and visual style. Her trademark of coolness is her unconventional fashion and eclectic makeup on stage and in her albums, including works by Eastern and Western artists such as Zing, Titi Kwan, Erik Halley, Alexander McQueen, and others. She features memorable outfits and makeup in her concerts: long sleeves, dreadlocks and silver painted tears (1994–5), an Indian chief look (1998–9), a headdress topped by an inverted shoe with a long feather (2003–5), and miscellaneous changes of painted eye shades, including one which resembled a swallow (2010–12).

Being recognized as original, Faye Wong’s coolness is branded as an attitude and appearance that is distant and nonchalant. Her star persona is frequently nurtured by her terse remarks and casual manner to the media. This recurring discourse promulgates a consistent account of her character and personality as *cool* – in the sense of being aloof and unaffectionate. To the public, she appears to be quietly provocative and sometimes irreverent. And, her detached outlook on what goes on around her appeals most and creates a huge fan base. Her screen personae

demonstrate restless, searching nature that cannot settle with any one way of living or relationship. In films, her characters resist any labeling – she either plays changeable characters, as in *The Chinese Odyssey 2002* (Jeffrey Lau, 2002), or characters who do not want to be pinned down or pegged in any way like Faye in *Chungking Express*. These characters, like her own artistic and music trajectories, keep on migratory routes that are continually drifting, nomadic, and multidirectional.

Remaking Faye Wong's brand of coolness, Wong Kar-wai utilizes the pop idol's popularity and marketability to explore themes such as intimate time and memory. Stardom is an "industry of desire" enacting capital, politics, ideology, and audience participation (Gledhill 1991: xiii–xx). Wong Kar-wai targets desire at the heart of contemporary filmmaking. In *Chungking Express* and *2046*, Faye Wong's screen presence does not propel the narrative of reciprocal love to closure; rather, it postpones the direction of heterosexual romance. Consequently, this *coolness* continues to evade heteronormative cultural practices, proposes queer time and space, and opens up a cosmopolitical intervention in the Wong Kar-wai and Faye Wong collaborations.

Early Works

The countercurrents of time, heterosexual love, family, and nation all affect Faye Wong's early TV works. In her initial TV appearances, Wong enacts multiple border crossings, including those between mainland China and Hong Kong. Her first mini TV movie was *Traces of the Heart* (1990), a lesbian-themed story shot by TVB (Television Broadcasts Limited) in Hong Kong. In it she plays a modest mainland girl named Fang who migrates to Hong Kong and becomes a singer at a nightclub. She has a mainland female friend, Wah, who has moved to Hong Kong and experienced an unsuccessful marriage. Fang is happy to unite with Wah in Hong Kong. Unknown to Fang, Wah has romantic interest in her. Fang is about to marry a Hong Kong man, Kwok, thus inciting Wah's jealousy and eventually resulting in the murder of Kwok.

During Hong Kong's imminent return to its motherland, *Traces of the Heart* represented an example of Hong Kong television and cinema during the 1997 transition. Li-Mei Chang points out that cinematic representations of mainlanders and Hong Kongers in Hong Kong cinema demonstrate "binary oppositions and power dominance of Hong Kong / First World / male and mainland China / Third World / female" (2001: 48). Because Faye Wong was a mainland immigrant in Hong Kong, her early efforts to indigenize her image as a local Hong Kong star reflect the First-World–Third-World dichotomy existing between Hong Kong and mainland China during the 1990s. During that period, mainland stars were generally considered provincial and thus not suitable for Hong Kong's entertainment industry. To neutralize her mainlander roots, Faye Wong used her stage

name “Shirley Wang Jingwen” (or Shirley Wong Ching-man in Cantonese) in order to blend in with the Cantopop industry during her early career. As she rose to stardom, she rejected “Shirley Wang Jingwen” in favor of her real name, Faye Wong.

In *Traces of the Heart*, the mainlanders are othered and feminized. Wah and Fang are mainland women whose bodies can be controlled by their Hong Kong male counterparts. Fang, a diasporic subject, finds friendship and intimacy with another, Wah. The presence of Fang and Wah in the narrative represents what Judith Halberstam calls “queer” temporality and spatiality that refer to “non-normative logics and organizations of community, sexual identity, embodiment, and activity in space and time.” (2005: 6). She defines “queer time” as models of temporality that “emerge within postmodernism once one leaves the temporal frames of bourgeois reproduction and family, longevity, risk/safety, and inheritance” (2005: 6). Halberstam continues that “queer space” refers to the “new understandings of space enabled by the production of queer counterpublics” (2005: 6). In this way, queer time and space continue to unsettle normative practices of lived bodily experience, performance, and visual representation. As a mainland diasporic subject, Faye Wong plays a screen persona who invokes a queerness that unravels the geopolitical contradictions between mainland and Hong Kong. The queer temporality and spatiality here demonstrate both oppression and destabilization of heterosexual love, family, and national borders. In contrast to Wah’s frigidity and coldness, Faye Wong plays a woman who seems to be sexually coy and passive, therefore allowing her coolness to inhabit an ambiguity that can be seen as readily assimilated by both the heteronormative time and the homo-normative narrative structures. Thus, such androgyny further reveals the paradoxes in the hegemonic representation of geopolitical locality, nation and, ethnicity that can be found in Faye Wong’s later screen personae.

After *Traces of the Heart*, Faye Wong continued to work in TV dramas such as *The Files of Justice (Part II)* (1992), *Legendary Ranger* (1993), *Eternity* (1993), and *Modern Love Story: Three Equals One Love* (1994). In these TV drama series, she plays roles that suggest less of her mainland roots and more of her assimilation as she becomes an “indigenous” Hong Kong subject. However, what remains is coolness that appears to be either distant or emotionally detached. For instance, in *Eternity*, a TV drama loosely based on the expedition sent by Emperor Qin to seek the elixir of immortality, Faye Wong plays a palace maiden (Bu Jinghong) who consumes the elixir and lives an eternal life in ancient China. The story is set in 1990s Hong Kong. Bu Jinghong, the maiden who has obtained immortality, is an emotionally distant and detached character, residing in the 1990s Hong Kong. Toward the end of the story, she saves a Hong Kong man called Lie Feng. Lie Feng asks Bu to marry him. During the wedding, the bride Bu suddenly disappears, leaving Lie Feng alone. Bu’s significance in the narrative does not press on toward closure or conclusion in a heterosexual romance. Represented as a ghostly figure wandering between ancient China and modern Hong Kong, Bu is a character whose coolness

and alternative femininity, associated with the paradox of history and modernity in the pre-1997 Hong Kong, puts forward a queer temporality that interrupts the heteronormative narrative of straight time and space.

Chungking Express

The film *Beyond's Diary* (Francis Sung, 1991) is generally considered to be Faye Wong's big screen debut. She plays a dutiful daughter and modest girlfriend; both are stereotypical roles for women in heterosexual romance. By this time, she had released several successful albums, such as *No Regrets*, *Mystery*, and *Random Thoughts*. The public persona she had developed, a woman with distinct subjectivity and active desire, transformed Hong Kong's music industry. In *Chungking Express*, her character is interwoven with her unique and adventurous star persona that had made her popular in Cantopop and Mandapop. Wong Kar-wai's *Chungking Express* brought Faye Wong to the attention of world cinema as she won the Best Actress Award at the Stockholm International Film Festival.

Inducing themes such as memory and emotion instead of the typical narratives of sex and action, *Chungking Express* plays a spin on the visual economy of the mainstream gangster/cop genre. The film is divided into two parts, revolving around the two independent stories of Cop 223 (Takeshi Kaneshiro) and Cop 663 (Tong Leung Chiu-wai). Faye Wong plays the heroine called Faye in the second half of the movie, despite her brief appearance in a scene with the drug-smuggling femme fatale (Brigitte Lin). The film focuses on how individuals attempt to get close to each other yet lack the courage to commit to any real relationships. By featuring Brigitte Lin, who plays the iconic androgynous "Asia the Invincible" in *Swordsman III: The East is Red* (Ching Siu-tung, Raymond Lee, 1993), *Chungking Express*'s visual protocols are not subject to the homogenous space and time of heteronormative romance. Rather, it moves to the queer effect of temporality and spatiality. This is demonstrated in the first story, as Cop 223 spends a night in a hotel with the charismatic drug smuggler (Brigitte Lin). Instead of being affectionately and sexually engaged with each other, they establish a platonic relationship in this presumably heteronormative time and space.

Similarly, *Chungking Express* further utilizes Faye Wong's cultural discourse of coolness to unremittingly divert and disrupt the heteronormative romance narrative. In the second story, when Cop 663 and Faye meet at the Midnight Express, a fast food store, Faye is the store assistant. Without Cop 663's noticing, the Jean Seberg-like Faye Wong, who loves listening to "California Dreamin'" by the Mamas and the Papas, has quietly fallen in love with him. Cop 663 has a flight attendant girlfriend who dumps him and drops a letter to Faye containing a key to Cop 663's apartment. Faye enters Cop 663's apartment, and, to indicate her affection, dedicates herself to the daily routine of caring for him by cleaning and redecorating his apartment.

Besides evoking Faye Wong's stardom, the film also references French New Wave films such as *Breathless* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1960). Unlike Jean Seberg's child-like yet sexual character in *Breathless*, Faye is a young woman who wavers between *shojo* (young girl) in East Asian *kawaii* culture and Jean Seberg's French New Wave image. Faye Wong's centerless, uncomprehending, and gender-neutral persona both reminds us of Jean Seberg and differs from Seberg's character in *Breathless*. In *Chungking Express*, by behaving childishly and narcissistically, Faye acts like a young girl indulging in the space between fantasy and reality. Thorsten Botz-Bornstein describes the influence of *kawaii* culture by situating Wong Kar-wai's films within the discourse of Asian modernities. As part of the aesthetics of cuteness (*kawai-rashisa*) that has been developing in Japan and East Asia since the 1980s, Faye resembles what Botz-Bornstein describes as a character who "refuses to recognize, in an adult way, [her] responsibilities toward the world" and "cannot express herself and is stuck between reality and fantasy" (2008: 96). Moving beyond the expectation of conventional heteronormative romance, Faye is a silent female spectator / young woman who *performs* the role of a childish young girl, attempting to evade the heterosexual male gaze. In *Chungking Express*, she enacts Jean Seberg's character but, unlike Seberg, she is not directly involved in a heterosexual romance; her life is compensated for by a kind of cool, distant, and idealized romanticism.

As Faye completely transforms Cop 663's apartment, Faye Wong's own song "Dream Lover" takes over the audio aspect of the film. On screen, we can see Faye adding fish to the aquarium, putting sleeping pills into Cop 663's drinking water, changing the wrappings of canned food, etc. During one shot, Faye looks directly into the camera, addresses the voyeuristic source, and shakes her head with the music, denying being an object of the gaze. In this scene, the music video style brings into play Faye Wong's popularity that extends beyond her music. It echoes the images in Faye Wong's albums such as *Random Thoughts* (1994) and *Mystery* (1994), featuring her with either short hair or as a tomboy, images that have led to her celebration as a queer icon "as her body cannot be pinned down by the straight mind that depends on the rigid dichotomies of male / female, masculine / feminine, desiring / desired" (Chou 1996 quoted in H. Chang 1998: 291).

Instead of being romantically involved with Cop 663 in his apartment, Faye rearranges commodities and items, including a photo, bedsheet, canned food, clothes, etc., that define her presence in this space. She engages in a narcissist self-love that is not marked by any male gaze and opens up an erotic space for female homoerotic projection of desire and imagination. Later, instead of accepting a date with Cop 663, Faye avoids being his object of desire, as her off-screen narrative suggests that she has left Hong Kong. Eventually she returns to Hong Kong after visiting California. Faye, wearing an airline hostess uniform, is shown as about to depart from Hong Kong soon after arrival. Throughout the film, Faye Wong's performance of multiple roles includes store assistant, dreamer, young girl, maiden, and visitor, among others. The playfulness in her performance operates outside the sense of time that directly correlates to heterosexual closure. Therefore, in the end,

it is uncertain whether Faye *performs*, or has indeed become, an airline hostess. At the old site of Midnight Express, currently under renovation, her brief reunion with Cop 663 is rife with endless possibilities but no guaranteed answer. This moment shows that Faye and Cop 663 are at a crossroads in this paradoxical space, as they are both uncertain of their future. In the film, Faye is a rootless character who occupies a “queer space” outside the camera’s heteronormative visual logics. Her character’s narcissistic self-indulgence and *coolness* continuously evades from the heteronormative cultural practices. In effect, the pop star’s cool and nonchalant persona in public pervades her screen presence in *Chungking Express*.

Wong Kar-wai associates both Faye Wong’s character and the pop star with the American 1960s pop song “California Dreamin’”, as Faye eventually leaves Hong Kong for California and then returns. This leads Gina Marchetti to ask the following question: “Is the hybridity of Hong Kong just a new take on American cultural imperialism? [...] Faye, for example, remarks when she returns to Hong Kong that California is ‘nothing much’” (Marchetti 2000: 306). Instead of cultural hegemony, in fact, the comparison between Hong Kong and California (Hollywood / American pop culture) shows that Hong Kong film and entertainment industries are playing the same game of globalism as American pop culture, only on a smaller scale. Synthesizing multiple temporalities and cultural texts, the Hong Kong–American connection as symbolized by “California Dreamin’” is soon replaced by Faye Wong’s Cantonese version of the song “Dreams” by the Irish rock band, The Cranberries. The inclusion of Faye Wong’s own interpretation of The Cranberries’ song, known as “Dream Lover,” is a self-reference to her stardom. Through juxtaposition of “California Dreamin’” and “Dream Lover” in the film, Faye Wong’s screen persona provokes the liminal space between reality and fantasy, interior and exterior, private and public, local and global. During the end credits, “Dream Lover” is featured through her vocal appropriation of The Cranberries’ song. Faye’s self-indulgence as well as the film’s self-referentiality to pop culture continue, as the director uses the pop star’s cultural values to reiterate time and contemporaneity. By doing so, the film subverts the expectation of narrative closure in conventional romance.

In *Chungking Express*, the first half of the film summons up the cultural meanings of androgyny surrounding Brigitte Lin’s role “Asia the Invincible” to disrupt heteronormative progress. In fact, Lin’s “Asia the Invincible” is seen as an analogous embodiment of Hong Kong cinema as the “Hollywood of the East” that “registers the industry’s pursuit of the global market, a pursuit that mirrors Hollywood’s, whose ‘authentic’ productions consolidate its screen hegemony” (Yau 2001: 8). In comparison, Faye’s story stages a narrative of fantasy and desire; it is a narrative of boundary crossings – of time and space – that continues to escape from being an object of male gaze. By consciously referring to Faye Wong as a pop idol, the director makes Faye distinctly different from the Jean Seberg persona in *Breathless*, the *shojo* (young girl) in East Asian *kawaii* culture, or an innocent imitator of American pop culture. The character, in particular, collides and colludes with the transcultural discourses of Eastern *kawaii* culture, French

New Wave, Euro-American pop culture, and Hong Kong pop culture. Faye's nomadic course between Hong Kong and California is embedded with unexpected trajectories and uncertainties. She manifests the disparate discourses regarding migration, changeover, and transition during the pre-1997 period. As a result, *Chungking Express* reveals the limits of cultural identification based on locality and geography. By recontextualizing the cultural discourse surrounding Faye Wong's stardom, the director contests the subjugated gaze that is based on nation-state fantasy. As an arguably original, distinctive, and idiosyncratic oeuvre, *Chungking Express* demonstrates a critical cultural thinking that moves beyond a more conventional "national cinema" approach. By branding Faye's coolness, *Chungking Express* proposes a cosmopolitical intervention, questioning the linear progress of time and sovereignty in the articulation and imagination of Hong Kong screen cultures.

After *Chungking Express*

After *Chungking Express*, Faye Wong appears in *Okinawa Rendez-vous* (Gordon Chan, 2000), *The Chinese Odyssey 2002*, and *Leaving Me, Loving You* (Wilson Yip, 2004). These films rely on the strength of Faye Wong's cultural meanings surrounding her coolness. As a pop star, Faye Wong's persona is constantly nurtured by public discourse between herself and her audience. From her divorces with Dou Wei and Li Yapeng to the much-criticized love affair with Nicholas Tse, Faye Wong's personal life is not only a hot topic but is also heterosexually coded, thus allowing her on-screen queerness and coolness to be navigated without the imminent threat to paternal visual economy in popular entertainment.

Okinawa Rendez-vous further explores Wong's persona as an emotionally detached and independent woman. This time, she is a Japanese gangster's girlfriend. As Faye Wong's character interacts with three male characters, her coolness often causes pauses in erotic narrative and heteronormative romance. It is therefore not surprising that she plays a runaway princess disguised as a man in her next film *The Chinese Odyssey 2002*. A costume comedy, *The Chinese Odyssey 2002*, makes fun of the melodrama of Wong Kar-wai's romances and includes Jeffrey Lau's parody of his own works, such as *A Chinese Odyssey Part One: The Pandora's Box* (Jeffrey Lau, 1995) and its sequel *A Chinese Odyssey Part Two: Cinderella* (Jeffrey Lau, 1995). As a princess in male disguise, Faye Wong's character is encountered by another desiring female character, Feng. In a romantic comedy, cross-dressing constructs scenarios of female homoerotic desire. The film narrative signifies the representation of a same-sex attraction. At the same time, the Princess in disguise as a man expresses her interest in Feng's brother, Long. This evokes ambiguous heterosexual as well as homoerotic tensions that are soon neutralized by laughter and parody.

In *Leaving Me, Loving You*, Faye Wong plays a professional party planner Xiaoyue, who is more determined and straightforward than her lover Zhou Qian (Leon Lai), an outpatient doctor working the streets of Shanghai, China. As Xiaoyue's prosperous business makes her independent and contentious, she assumes the masculine attributes of independence and decision-making. In comparison, Zhou Qian and his indeterminacy reveal a feminized male subject. Being cool and independent, Xiaoyue postpones the paternal economy that a heteronormative romance expects. Her cool demeanor stands detached from male gaze in heterosexual romance. Xiaoyue's independence alters the paternal economy in the narrative as the urban landscape challenges what used to define man and woman in traditional gendered family relations in China. Indeed, Faye Wong's transnational star status beyond the mainland and Hong Kong disrupts a homogeneous and linear temporality in narrating the Chinese nation.

2046

After *Chungking Express* the next collaboration between Wong Kar-wai and Faye Wong was *2046* (2004). By this time, Wong Kar-wai had become the first Chinese director to win the Best Director Award at the Cannes Film Festival with *Happy Together* (1997), a film that examines the queer affect of time and space through the love journey of a gay couple. Faye Wong had released several popular albums and conducted concerts in different parts of the world that consolidated her status as the "Heavenly Queen." Indeed, she had created a cult interest beyond the diasporic world of Cantonese and Mandarin pop music. Her popularity was noticeable in the rest of Asia, as she acted in a Japanese TV serial, *Usokoi* (2001) and released two Japanese songs ("Separate Ways" and "Valentino Radio"). *Usokoi* makes use of Faye Wong as well as exploiting Japanese TV drama's popularity in the rest of Asia. Wong plays a woman from China who forges her way in Japan, a role echoing some of themes of exile and displacement associated with Faye Wong's personae in her other films and TV works.

2046, which opened at the Cannes Film Festival in 2004, is a film that revolves around Chow Mo-wan (played by Tony Leung Chiu-wai), a man with the same name and history as the lead character of *In the Mood for Love* (Wong Kar-wai, 2000). The Chow Mo-wan of *2046* is a womanizer and writer of erotic fiction for Hong Kong newspapers during the 1960s. Leaving Singapore and a mysterious woman in black played by Gong Li, Chow temporarily settles in Hong Kong, soon before the outbreaks of the anti-colonial riots in 1967. He takes up residence in an apartment hotel, run by an owner called Mr. Wang. Among his new neighbors is a call-girl named Bai Ling. Chow begins to spend his days voyeuristically observing the people, among them the hotel owner's daughter Wang Jingwen (played by Faye Wong), who visit and stay in room 2046. Again, Jingwen alludes to Faye

Wong's early stage name "Wang Jingwen." *2046* takes its inspiration from pop and high cultures in both Eastern and Western contexts. Stephen Teo suggests that Wong Kar-wai demonstrates cinematic recovery of Hong Kong's lost memories with "images, the mood, and the music (a more comprehensive selection than usual: original themes from Shigeru Umebayashi, themes from Peer Raben, Georges Delerue, and Zbigniew Preisner, plus arias extracted from Bellini's operas *Norma* and *Il Pirata*, the voices of Nat King Cole, Dean Martin, Connie Francis, among others)" (2005: 149).

In re-presenting an old Hong Kong society in the 1960s, *2046* invokes nostalgic films through the major narrative of romantic love. By reflecting on the past in the present, Faye Wong's sixties look recalls Cathay star Jeanette Lin Tsui. Known as "Ms. No," Jeanette Lin was a star who embodied both feminine and masculine traits in films such as *Turnabout Girl* (Chen Huanwen, 1956). She dared to say "No" as a young startup actress in Hong Kong's movie industry during the 1950s (Suzi 2010: 87). Juxtaposing the popular cultural constructions of androgyny and coolness surrounding Jeanette Lin (1950s) and Faye Wong (1990s-present), Wong Kar-wai reinvents 1960s Hong Kong by destabilizing the very idea of a clearly demarcated present and past.

In *2046*, Faye Wong plays two characters in different time periods: the hotel owner's emotionally detached and modest daughter in the 1960s, and an android servant in 2047. Although Chow is in love with Jingwen, he never directly expresses his affection. In fact, Jingwen has a Japanese boyfriend (played by the Japanese pop star Takuya Kimura); but her father, Mr. Wang, refuses to meet her boyfriend. Though it was never mentioned directly in the film, Mr. Wang's opposition is largely due to the results of the Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945) in the mainland and Japan's occupation of Hong Kong (1941–1945) at a time when many Chinese were killed by occupying Japanese military forces. Despite her father's objection, the seemingly coy and quiet Jingwen continues her love relationship and correspondence with her boyfriend.

In *2046*, characters speak in different dialects or languages, including Cantonese, Mandarin, and Japanese, reflecting their diverse origins and identities. Chow's affairs with various women all rotate around themes of "promises, betrayals, and myths" that have been inspired by nineteenth-century Western operas, such as *Madame Butterfly*, *Carmen* and *Tannhäuser* (Brunette 2005: 107). In analyzing Chow's relationship with various women, Teo suggests an allegorical and heteronormative reading of Hong Kong's relationship with mainland China. Teo says, "the film denotes Hong Kong's affair with China through Chow's affairs with mainland women: Zhang Ziyi [Bai Ling], Faye Wong [Jingwen], Gong Li [Su Lizhen] and Dong Jie [Jingwen's younger sister who has a brief flirtation with Chow]" (2005: 149). By showing Chow's various unconsummated affairs with women from mainland Chinese descent such as Bai Ling, Su Lizhen, and Jingwen's younger sister, Wong Kar-wai reflects the irony of union or reunification that is generally recounted in the grand, heteronormative visual practices of historical progress and nationhood.

Instead of playing a Mandarin-speaking woman like these other three actresses, Faye Wong's character speaks mostly Cantonese and occasionally Japanese, thus demonstrating her hybrid persona. Although Chow has affectionate feelings for Jingwen, Jingwen is not romantically linked to him. In his narrative, Chow portrays her as his ideal object of adoration. This unobtainable desire on-screen demonstrates not so much what Teo proposes as a heteronormative time based on nationhood (mainland China's relationship with Hong Kong). Rather, it puts forward a queer visual economy that not only interrupts the heteronormative discourse surrounding Chow and Jingwen, but also Jingwen and her Japanese boyfriend.

For example, Chow's intimate relationship with Bai Ling is filmed in shots where they return each other's gaze and desire in clear sight lines. In comparison, despite Jingwen and her boyfriend being in love, they are typically filmed in shots that feature them separately. When they are shown in the same frame, the camera angle is often awkward, decentered or far from its subjects. For instance, a wide shot shows them in an embrace with Faye Wong's back towards the camera, avoiding a straightforward exchange of affection. When her boyfriend asks her to go to Japan with him, Jingwen remains silent and seems unable to speak. The intersecting camera sequences fragment the hallway into a wrecked space, breaking up the lovers with variations on inexorable counter shots. By doing so, the director disassembles direct exchanges of amorous gazes and sight lines. Withholding her emotion, the coy Jingwen refuses to give him an answer. This reminds us retrospectively of an earlier sequence, when Jingwen is first introduced by Chow as she is practicing Japanese at room 2046. At that time, she says in Japanese all the words that she wanted to say to her sweetheart at this farewell: "Sure! I'll go with you!" Instead of a continuous flow in Jingwen's true feelings, Wong Kar-wai discloses a temporal disjunction with linearity and progress.

Later, Chow learns from Jingwen's father that with his approval, Jingwen is going to marry her boyfriend in Japan. It is the only relationship in the film with a happy ending. By narrating a "happy" union in Japan, Jingwen's female coolness and modesty is assimilated into a presumably heteronormative discourse. At the same time, by placing this narrative off-screen, it also unfolds a fantasized queer temporality and spatiality that counteract the normative visual protocols that are based on patriotic citizenship and nationhood.

Indeed, the love story between Jingwen and her Japanese boyfriend in 2046 builds on what Koichi Iwabuchi describes as "the recognition of Hong Kong's synchronous temporality with Japan" in constructing "national/ cultural identity in an era of widely proliferated Asian modernities" (2002: 548). 2046 conjures up time and space that are repositioned by three periods: the 1960s in the film narrative (Jingwen the character); the 1990s, through the genealogy of Faye Wong's stardom (Jingwen, her stage name in the early 1990s); and 2047, with the android servant. By revealing such incongruous modes of time and space, the director calls to attention a meta-discourse regarding the coevalness and discrepancies between the two Asian celebrities: Faye Wong and Takuya Kimura.

A pop star epitomizes a particular time span and generation. Faye Wong and Takuya Kimura represent the golden ages of Hong Kong and Japanese pop cultures in the 1990s. Kimura rose to pop star status during the 1990s when he starred in Japanese TV drama series *Long Vacation* (1996) and *Love Generation* (1997) that became hits throughout Asia. With Faye Wong starring as a diva in the role, *2046* elaborates on the cultural values of her stardom. In the section set in 1960s, the film, by appropriating her early stage name, invokes her stardom as an interface with the legacy of 1990s Hong Kong film and music industries. Nowadays, other Asian booms, such as South Korean artists and singers, have achieved popularity among young generations in mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Vietnam, and other Asian nations. By projecting a view of the co-existence of past and future that detests a journey of linear progress, the film suggests contemporaneity as well as disjuncture with Japan. It is a critical reflection on Hong Kong pop culture's role in the twenty-first century, but does not impose a totalizing perspective on the region's diverse and alternative modernities. Generating discourses about Asian modernities, Wong Kar-wai re-contextualizes the genealogy of Faye Wong's stardom and dismantles the prevailing conceptions of time and space in national modernities, such as those of China or Japan. This in turn reflects Wong Kar-wai's cosmopolitical perspective that navigates the specters of nation-states and regional modernities.

While reliving his nostalgic memories, Chow writes a series of futuristic stories, with the characters representing those he meets in his life. Set in the year 2047, the story centers on the female android servant (Faye Wong) and a mysterious Japanese traveler (Takuya Kimura). In this story, a Japanese man leaves the world of 2046, but falls in love with an android servant who has delayed reactions. While Chow bases the story on Jingwen and her boyfriend, he realizes that the story is ultimately about him as he projects his desire and loss into the story, particularly in the character of the Japanese traveler. Thus, filtering reality through the lens of fantasy, Chow reminds us that fantasy is "the little piece of imagination by which we gain access to reality – the frame that guarantees our access to reality, our 'sense of reality' (when our fundamental fantasy is shattered, we experience the 'loss of reality')" (Zizek 1999: 122). By writing his stories, Chow creates fantasy to fill out the fact that desire itself cannot be fulfilled. Chow's characters are strongly rooted in the past, as he applies the idea of the past superimposing itself on the future.

In *2046*, the opening and end credits sequences are visual allusions to sci-fi films such as *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, 1982) and *Ghost in the Shell* (Mamoru Oshii 1995). This time, *2046* represents an allegory of Hong Kong as an animated, futuristic megalopolis. The film begins with a traveler's (Kimura) narrative in Japanese. An extreme close-up gives Faye Wong's android, an abstractness in color, framing, and image that is close to the Japanese *manga* style. In fact, Faye Wong's android character cross-references to the female fictional post-human figures in earlier films, including the clone Ripley in *Alien 3* (David Fincher, 1992), the female cyborg cop Motoko in *Ghost in the Shell*, and the female cyborg Meiling (Charlene Choi) in the Hong Kong film *Hidden Heroes* (Joe Ma and Cheang Pou-soi, 2004) – a parody

of both *Ghost in the Shell* and *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (James Cameron, 1991). Ellen Ripley, Motoko, and the cyborg Meiling are revived as powerful post-humans who must continue their wars against opponents in order to save the world. The android's cinematic references juxtapose Asian modernities (as symbolized by Japan and Hong Kong), with globalism (as represented by Hollywood). The film *2046* further urges us to re-imagine the future. In 2047, the android character (resembling Jingwen) fails to emotionally unite with the Japanese traveler (resembling Jingwen's Japanese lover), thus contesting the fantastical narrative about the Japan–Hong Kong coevalness of modernities in the other half of the film.

By managing the traumatic loss of an unattainable object, allegorically a glorious history of Hong Kong popular culture, Wong Kar-wai creates a fantasyland in 2047 for Chow to lament a past that cannot be recovered. Set in the year 2047, the second section of the film can be interpreted as a futuristic allegory regarding Hong Kong. 2047 is 50 years after 1997, the year of the handover. In 1984, the People's Republic of China and the United Kingdom signed the Joint Declaration that was an assurance by the People's Republic of China that it would adopt a "One Country, Two Systems" principle, and that Hong Kong would continue its previous capitalist system and way of life for a period of 50 years after Hong Kong's handover to the mainland. It was China's promise that Hong Kong could "keep dancing, keep going to the races and keep the stock market alive." In *2046*, such a projection towards 2047 is represented by the narrator in a future that reverberates in the present (hotel room 2046). Although not directly mentioned in *2046*, 1997 is the pivotal point that continues to *haunt* the past and the future.

In *2046*, by questioning whether the android is capable of emotion, Faye Wong's coolness is disguised as an *almost* human that uses technology to strike out new possibilities for subjectivity. She is a female android in the technological system of a future that is seen as unknown, thus a potential threat to the stable notion of the human subject. Yet, such a threat re-inscribes the sexualized / feminized outlook, the master–servant dialectic of technology (android as a servant), and the potential of human emotion to repress the menace of the future.

Chow maps the imminent socio-political uncertainty of Hong Kong to the multiple dimensions of temporality and space. Faye Wong's post-human figure functions as a metaphor and allegory for incorporating and subverting the future. While telling his story from a masculinist narrative, Chow's gaze upon the android reflects his emotional projection as he explains to himself that the android has no reaction because she loved someone else. The android's silvery clothing emphasizes the female sexualized form; it is erotic yet dispassionate and cool. Such coolness deflects the gaze back to the gazer and reveals the cold shininess of her silvery cover: she is post-human and cannot fit into the symbolic structure of human subjects and history. Capitalizing on Faye Wong as a cultural icon, *2046* suggests an ambiguity and paradox in the signifying process of coolness. Under the layers of a futuristic coat of silvery metal clothing, Faye Wong's character problematizes and disrupts the masculinist, linear narration of history.

By investigating how “Hong Kong’s cinema and the films of Wong Kar-wai in particular haunt and trouble the time schemes of national modernity,” Chris Berry and Mary Farquhar have demonstrated the way in which the director “refuses the idea of singular, unified body of people (the nation) moving in any particular direction, and instead insists on multiple and simultaneous possibilities” (2006: 44, 46). Instead of multiple belonging and simultaneous possibilities, Wong Kar-wai positions the pop star’s ambiguous engagements in both homonormative and heteronormative time/space to complicate the hegemonic discourses on culture and society. Faye Wong’s androgynous persona operates as a narrative strategy to demonstrate a cosmopolitical perspective of Hong Kong’s new SAR, with its unique socio-cultural history, unassimilated into the collective sovereign agent and the journey of linear progress towards a nation-state. By contesting the intimate relationship between memory and notions of time and space, Wong Kar-wai questions the singular, unified vision of statehood and autonomy. As the character Chow comments, “Love is all a matter of timing. It’s no good meeting the right person too soon or too late. If I’d lived in another time or place, my story might have a very different ending.” If national modernity *looks* progressively forward into the future and the critical account of history *looks* nostalgically backward to the past, Wong Kar-wai displaces these mainstream gazes from *other* temporality and spatiality.

Wong Kar-wai’s deployment of Faye Wong’s complex stardom – being inducted into Hong Kong, ethnically Chinese, with diasporic experiences – demonstrates a cosmopolitical view of Hong Kong’s relation to the mainland. The film shows the fear that nationalist and paternal visual economy would eventually incorporate Hong Kong SAR into a seemingly unitary cultural space of “motherland” or “Chineseness.” Wong Kar-wai resists this inscription through the discrepant temporalities/spatialities that are consigned by cinematic enunciations of Faye Wong’s coolness, as coy (Jingwen), starlike (Wang Jingwen), and post-human (android). Hence, the juxtapositions of various time periods – 1960s, pre- and post-1997, and 2047— re-present paramount moments in which the linear temporality of paternal economy of nationalism and heteronormative is disrupted, where multiple temporalities of both the global and local brush up against each other. Indeed, Faye Wong’s coy Jingwen in the 1960s and the emotionless android in 2047, together with the cultural values of her coolness, devise a cosmopolitical intervention in Eastern and Western cinematic discourses. By ratifying the watershed moment of the 1960s riots through popular culture, Wong Kar-wai’s *2046* creates a post-1997 and post-apocalyptic cinematic landscape that inadvertently foretells the 2014 protests in Hong Kong. In imagining its future relationship with communist China, Hong Kong sees the potential threat that will destroy its transnational process of becoming and self-transformation. Here, deterritorialization and reterritorialization of both the local and the global are seamlessly conjoined as Hong Kong undergoes socio-political changes during and after the 1997 transition. In *2046*, the allegory of the human condition in the post-humanist prospectus allows the portrayal of a

potential utopian or dystopian future. On the level of symbolic construction of screen persona, Faye Wong, a star of coolness, becomes a transmigration figure that transmutes between human and post-human.

Faye Wong's stardom provokes an unspoken subjectivity, like her characters' silence and coolness, that goes beyond identitarian, geographic, political, and economic entities, and becomes cosmopolitical. In *2046*, the android is symbolically displaced from any stable identification, human and post-human, East and West, local and global. Like Faye Wong's long-lasting stardom, this futurized female form engages in a paradoxical exercise that plays with and subverts the established structure of masculinist and national significations. By invoking emotion and memory, past and future, Faye Wong's screen personae in both the 1960s and 2047 navigate the antinomies of the organic and the mechanical, the body and human consciousness, and local and global. Using coolness as a thematic tool, Wong Kar-wai recontextualizes Faye Wong's cultural meanings to call upon a perpetual present – the genealogy of a pop star as her contemporaneity. In this way, past, present, and future are conjured up to create a kaleidoscopic vision of time, resulting in a cosmopolitical intervention that interrupts the homogeneous and heteronormative ideologies of nation, territory, and history.

Conclusion

Through a cultural strategy of coolness, Faye Wong's screen personae travel through the transnational landscape of Chinese language film industries. By re-contextualizing Faye Wong's genealogy as a pop star in his films, Wong Kar-wai provides us with a focal point of critical thinking that unsettles the temporal and spatial longing for authenticity and subjectification in the narration of Hong Kong's screenscapes. In effect juxtaposing coolness and sentimentality as well as the local and the global, Faye Wong's transnational artistic trajectory demonstrates a cosmopolitical intervention in the ever-changing fantasies and realities of Hong Kong screen cultures.

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Commentary

Hong Kong Stars and Stardom

Gary Bettinson

The word “star” is an illusion, it is something – what the public calls you. You should look upon [yourself] as an actor. I mean you would be very pleased if somebody said, “Hey man, you’re a super actor!” It is much better than “superstar.”

–Bruce Lee¹

What characterizes Hong Kong stars and stardom? How have scholars theorized these phenomena? What avenues of research remain to be charted? This short commentary sketches some answers to these questions, and sets into relief several entrenched fallacies pertaining to Hong Kong’s contemporary star system. One such premise dismisses the young idols that emerged at the start of this century – a group that includes Edison Chen, Ekin Cheng, Cecilia Cheung, Charlene Choi, Gillian Chung, Karena Lam, Nicholas Tse, and Shawn Yue – as essentially untrained and unskilled ciphers, devoid of the star quality and acting prowess possessed by the stars who immediately preceded them (Leslie Cheung, Maggie Cheung, Tony Leung Chiu-wai, Chow Yun-fat, Brigitte Lin, and others).² A second premise denies that even figures such as Chow Yun-fat possess genuine acting skill, but rather rely on charisma, glamor, likeability, and other superficial crutches to popular appeal. Still another premise – implicit in Bruce Lee’s remark above – takes the view that *star* and *actor* are mutually exclusive categories. Presently, I will advocate what might be called a poetics of performance, an avenue of research that to some extent collapses the star/actor distinction, and that opens up an area of investigation previously neglected in Chinese star studies.

In the existing scholarship, one adjective is recurrently invoked to characterize Hong Kong stars: flexibility. In one sense, this term denotes versatility – in a film industry steeped in cultural traditions of masquerade and makeover, the Hong Kong star assumes many guises. A second sense of the term pertains to the star’s negotiation of multiple cross-media identities. The synergistic film, music, and television industries, across which Hong Kong stars routinely traverse, ensure that the star image remains malleable, even as audiences are assured of its integrity and permanence. By any standard, the Hong Kong star image is highly polysemous.

The local film industry alone precludes univocality: major stars such as Tony Leung Chiu-wai oscillate between high-concept blockbusters (*Infernal Affairs* [Alan Mak and Felix Chong, 2002]) and prestige items (*The Grandmaster* [Wong Kar-wai, 2013]), and between locally-oriented product (*Sound of Colors* [Joe Ma, 2003]) and transnational behemoths (*Red Cliff* [John Woo, 2008]), accumulating a host of intertextual associations. The star's mobility in turn engenders another kind of flexibility, as international distributors mold the star image to the demands of specific markets (see Martin 2014).

Like the idols it produces, the Hong Kong star system is a flexible entity. It permits various points of entry, including the music, television, and modeling industries, as well as the fields of martial arts, dance, and Peking Opera, and popular contests such as beauty pageants and talent shows. The system also proves adaptable and efficient by generating new clusters of stars to "replace" older stars and attract young viewers. From another angle, however, the Hong Kong star system is a rigid organism. Star careers tend to trace a predictable trajectory: many leading female stars retire prematurely, while established male stars – challenged by fashionable newcomers – often move into directing and production roles. As in other popular cinemas, too, stars remain rooted at the center of mainstream production. Even purveyors of relatively "personal" films regularly turn out star vehicles; witness Milkyway Image, and its star-driven hits *Needing You...* (Johnnie To and Wai Ka-fai, 2000) and *Don't Go Breaking My Heart* (Johnnie To and Wai Ka-fai, 2011; and its sequel, 2014). Such cases betray the inextricability of stars and movie financing. As one Milkyway screenwriter reveals:

On *Mad Detective* (Johnnie To and Wai Ka-fai, 2007) the investor, China Star, made it a condition of financing that its client (Andy On) was given a leading role that would make him shine. Likewise, the main actor in *Life Without Principle* (Johnnie To, 2011) is Denise Ho, a singer signed to Media Asia. In exchange for finance, Media Asia wanted Johnnie To to help make her a star. So the Milkyway team has to work not only at making a good film, but at star development as well.³

Modern-day stardom is a double-edged sword. A loyal and patient domestic audience exists for well-loved stars such as Eason Chan, but a culture of rampant celebrity gossip and infotainment has claimed many a celebrity casualty. Today's stars must cope with media intrusion without the corporate buffer granted past matinee idols. "The new stars have to protect themselves," says Shaw Brothers veteran David Chiang. "In my day, the studio protected us. Nowadays even the companies that hire the young stars want them involved in some kind of scandal – that way, they can claim the newspaper's front page."⁴ Revelations of private sex scandals can shock the local audience (hence the Edison Chen outrage of 2008 provoked a "moral panic" among the populace; see Farmer 2009⁵). For young idols implicated in sexual controversy, the penalty may be temporary expulsion from the film industry. (Hong Kong cinema prefers its idols chaste; it is no accident

that the region's resurgent softcore porn movies, such as the *Lan Kwai Fong* franchise [Wilson Chin, 2011–14] and *Love Actually...Sucks!* [Scud, 2011], are devoid of established major stars.)

The new stars have labored in the shadow of the preceding generation. Detractors contend that whereas the 1980s stars nurtured their acting talents through formal training and hours of television exposure, the new “cookie-cutter” idols are culled from the modeling and music industries by producers to whom “dramatic ability is [a] secondary [concern]” (Hu 2006: 410). Yet this viewpoint, apparently widely held, skews matters. For one thing, not all the 1980s stars received formal training, and some major talents (including Leslie Cheung and Anita Mui) migrated to cinema from music backgrounds – just like many contemporary young idols. Moreover, the 1980s stars emerged as the decade's production boom began, and some of them appeared in as many as 16 films per year (Leung 2007). Not only did this high output provide numerous opportunities for these stars to hone their craft; it also allowed their fan bases to coalesce. By contrast, present-day idols may star in only one or two films per year, and their nascent film career may be curtailed if a devoted audience does not soon materialize. We might add that TVB's performing artist training program – the career springboard for Stephen Chow, Chow Yun-fat, Tony Leung Chiu-wai, and other 1980s stars – remains operative, and many newcomers receive practical training there.

If the talents of the new generation have gone unrecognized, nevertheless Hong Kong stardom has attracted a considerable amount of scholarly attention in recent years. This body of literature has approached its subject from many fruitful angles: class, race, national identity, gender, capitalism, and anti- and post-colonialism. (Several of the impressive chapters in the present book develop these areas of debate.) Without question, the dominant topic in the past decade has been transnational stardom. Multifaceted and timely, this area of investigation has generated a fund of compelling arguments. Mark Gallagher (2004) examines Jackie Chan's persona within particular national contexts, revealing that Chan's brand of masculinity – which in certain respects is antithetical to Western definitions of masculinity – undergoes strategic revision once Chan enters the Hollywood industry. Daniel Martin (2014) similarly examines the flexible Hong Kong star image as it circulates and accrues new meanings in different hemispheres. However, whereas Gallagher explores how the Hong Kong star image is redefined by contrasting cultural norms (of masculinity), Martin examines how the star image is reinvented by Western distribution, promotion, marketing, and critical discourses. Sabrina Qiong Yu (2012), meanwhile, adopts Jet Li as a major case study to elucidate the transnational mobility of Hong Kong cinema's kung fu stars. Like the majority of work in this research tradition, Yu's study of transnational stardom is also an examination of gender and audience reception, attending to the star's shifting gender significations within different cultural contexts. This body of work is further unified by a desire to go “outside”

or beyond the text, in order to research critical reception, fan culture, press reviews, distribution practices, and so forth. Much of this research has yielded outstanding insights, deepening our understanding of the polysemous complexity of Hong Kong stars and stardom.

Toward a Poetics of Performance

Where does the study of Hong Kong stars and stardom go from here? Certainly the development of those theoretical frameworks noted above can further enrich the field. In addition to these ongoing lines of inquiry, I propose that researchers pursue a poetics of Hong Kong film acting and star performance. Central to this endeavor is the fine-grained analysis of the star's filmic performance, its moment-by-moment construction, its repertoire of actions, gestures, and facial and vocal cues. Such an approach examines the star's acting technique and the textual unfolding of her or his expressive activity. As such, it must necessarily address not only the actor's activity but also the role played by narration and style in the construction of performance. We might here recall the Bruce Lee remark that sits at the top of this chapter, for the dualism of "star" and "actor" represents an enduring tension within academic star studies. Indeed, while existing scholarship has brought to light compelling aspects of Hong Kong *stardom*, it has slighted the crucial issue of acting. We know remarkably little, for instance, about individual, genre-based, and historical styles of acting in this region's cinema. Moreover, many studies of specific stars bypass acting technique in favor of hermeneutic readings of the "star text," or empirical analyses of paratexts (critics' reviews, tabloid reports, online fan fora, and the like). cursory attempts to characterize a star's acting style often amount to grossly misleading comparisons with Hollywood stars – hence one critic brands Takeshi Kaneshiro "Asia's Johnny Depp," while others posit shorthand correlations between Maggie Cheung and Audrey Hepburn, Jet Li and Gene Kelly, Alexander Fu Sheng and James Dean, Anita Mui and Madonna, Andy Lau and Errol Flynn, and so forth.⁶ If we are to take the measure of Hong Kong stars, we need a more robust insight into their techniques of characterization, and a better appreciation of the acting skills, both intuitive and studied, that are so deeply imbricated with their star personae and popular appeal. As yet, the study of the region's stars has not illuminated the traditions and practices of Hong Kong screen acting.

How do we account for this critical neglect? Most simply, other important research agendas have taken precedence. For some critics, moreover, to dissect the mechanics of performance is to cause that performance to ossify, to render it lifeless and sterile. Such analyses apparently become lost in minutiae, and may be perceived as undesirably objective or "scientific." Conversely, some critics worry that analyses of star performance cannot but rest upon subjective assertions

of personal taste and a concomitant lack of critical distance. Other explanations may be hypothesized. I have already noted the view that Hong Kong stars display not so much acting prowess as charisma, star presence, cuteness, or some equally ineffable quality. One critic, for instance, asserts that “Andy Lau is not a good actor, but [his] charisma is radiant” (Ho 2005: 69). It is possible that some scholars have tacitly absorbed such intuitive opinions.⁷ I surmise that this disparagement of Hong Kong stars has its basis in the conditions of Hong Kong film production: traditionally, the region’s films were shot at a fast clip (thus, supposedly, the star has scant time to “prepare” between takes); they often were filmed in ad hoc fashion (there is neither a preproduction screenplay that the star may study, nor a rehearsal period during which she or he can sculpt a characterization); and the major stars were often simultaneously involved in other productions (thus rather than differentiating characters, she or he relies on a tried-and-proven persona, and therefore is “always the same” from film to film). That some stars of the present generation are not trained actors also compels critics to be dismissive of their ability. To all this we might add the perception, encouraged by popular star discourses, that Hong Kong stars simply “play themselves,” thus making acting talent a moot issue.⁸

For the most part, these negative assumptions – and also much of the *praise* conferred upon Hong Kong stars – have not been theorized by critics or substantiated with textual evidence. (Here I do not mean to imply that the aim of analysis must be evaluative, only that it can be.) Partly this paucity of supporting evidence is corollary to a disciplinary retreat from so-called text-based methodologies. Leung Wing-fai and Andy Willis note the field’s development “from the simply textual to the contextual” (Leung and Willis 2014: 3), while Sabrina Qiong Yu “reject[s] the text-centred approach” in her study of Jet Li, and instead focuses analysis on audience reception (Yu 2012: 22). The inference seems to be that, until recently, text-based approaches dominated Asian star studies. This assumption may hold water. But scholars have not exhausted the purview of textual analysis, and few of the existing text-based studies of Hong Kong stars adopt the kind of close examination of performance I have in mind.

Though centered on a mainland Chinese star, Mette Hjort’s study of Ruan Lingyu (2010) points to the kind of poetics of star performance I envisage. Taking her cue from Alan Lovell and Peter Krämer, whose anthology *Screen Acting* (1999) examines Hollywood and British film stardom and performance, Hjort constructs a “descriptive and explanatory” account of Ruan’s star image (Hjort 2010: 33). Central to her enterprise is the examination of Ruan’s performance style. Anchoring her analysis in specific sequences from *The Goddess* (1934), Hjort effectively reconstructs Ruan’s performance as it unfolds in screen duration, illuminating its complex shifts in behavior and emotional expression. This analysis permits Hjort to isolate several performative trademarks, which she posits both as a set of star traits and as feats of acting: emotional complexity and perspicuity, versatility, subtle inference via facial and bodily behavior, creative

engagement with props, empathetic identification, and several other signature techniques. Throughout, Hjort does not lose sight of the cinematic devices abetting Ruan's activity, deftly revealing how cinematography and editing contribute to the construction of the star's performance. In all, Hjort's sensitively nuanced analysis allows us to understand and appreciate Ruan's star persona, popular appeal, and acting technique in a way that casual Western-centric analogies (e.g., Ruan Lingyu is "the Greta Garbo or Marlene Dietrich of China" [Hjort 2010: 33]) fail to achieve.

Guided by specific research questions, a poetics of performance can illuminate a range of phenomena. It can elucidate individual performance style in a single film (as does Hjort's study of Ruan) or across a body of work, identifying the typifying traits of a persona. Here one might consider the star's expressive choices, the dramatic functions that motivate these choices, the ways they are made salient by both the performer and the filmic discourse, and so forth. Alternatively we might undertake a comparative analysis of several Hong Kong stars, in order to establish, say, the existence of a local or regional style of acting. For the historian, a poetics of performance can bring to light traditions of screen acting. The historian might look for shifting criteria of naturalistic behavior across Hong Kong film history, or examine the ways that the pantomimic tradition of acting has been sustained or transformed. A historical study can shed light on the acting styles that were popular in (say) the 1950s Cantonese cinema, and the techniques that the leading stars of this era had to cultivate. Or the historian might investigate how and when technological and stylistic change impinges on historical norms of performance and onscreen star construction. For instance, some contemporary blockbusters such as *The Monkey King* (2014) – a star-driven fantasy featuring Donnie Yen, Chow Yun-fat, and Aaron Kwok – oblige us to examine the relationship between indexical and CGI-assisted star performance.

Scholars might also look to popular genre for styles or traditions of performance. Does a definitive performative register accompany the historical *wuxia* film, or the "Kowloon noir" subgenre? Observing the graceful agility of a swordsman in combat, moreover, might lead us to explore the ways that Hong Kong's action cinema has absorbed and adapted other artistic and expressive traditions (e.g., Peking Opera, ballet, martial arts). At the level of story we can ask how, in particular cases, performative cues shape narrative meaning, hint at dramatic subtext, or crystallize into essential character traits. Such concerns compel us to attend to the moment-by-moment revelation of the player's performance. The poetics approach can mobilize other under-researched areas. In what ways is expressivity facilitated, constrained, or channeled by particulars of costume and make-up (think, for instance, of Andy Lau's fat-suit in *Love on a Diet* [Johnnie To and Wai Ka-fai, 2001], or of the local cinema's traditions of cross-dressing and masquerade)? How do specific production practices and work routines shape the star's performance? For instance, how does Wong Kar-wai's approach of high shooting ratio and repeated takes impact upon his stars' acting? How does Johnnie

To's custom of post-production dubbing affect the actor's facial and bodily expressiveness? To what extent does post-synching compromise apparently pivotal star values such as "authenticity"?

By closely analyzing screen performance, the critic can gain a better purchase on an actor's stardom. Of a particular star we may ask: what features of performance, persona, and physicality are apt to foster identification, perceptions of cool, attractiveness, and specialness, and other affirmative responses? Examining the star's onscreen activity can help us to comprehend – and theorize with greater rigor and precision – such elusive and putatively "undefinable" star qualities as charisma and likeability (upon which, allegedly, the success of many Hong Kong stars depends). These inquiries cannot of themselves account for a star's broad appeal, but they can usefully supplement extrafilmic explanations of her or his popularity (e.g., pertaining to the scale and substance of promotion and marketing around the star; cultural and historical standards of beauty and glamor; popular norms of performance within a particular epoch; and so on). Questions of authorship and agency may also come into focus. The credibility of the "star-as-auteur" premise may be tested by tracking performative continuities across a filmography. Star vehicles may profitably disclose tactics whereby the star persona is amplified (e.g., for crowd-pleasing effect) or subdued (e.g., when the star self-consciously plays "against type"). And the star's tendency to deform or mesh with genre archetypes (the sage *sifu*, the doomed courtesan, the vengeful swordsman) may also be fruitfully studied.

Above all, a poetics of screen performance, by means of textual analysis and theoretical deliberation, can enrich our appreciation of Hong Kong stars' achievements and popular appeal. By adopting this approach, we take seriously the remarks of stars such as Bruce Lee, who exhort us not to let the glare of their stardom blind us to their acting talent. At the same time, we acknowledge that "star" and "actor" are not incompatible phenomena. Like many Hong Kong stars, Bruce Lee evinces demonstrable skills in the craft of acting, skills which have yet to be fully characterized, theorized, and evaluated. To be sure, some Hong Kong stars will not reward close examination of acting and performance (just as not all Hollywood stars warrant close performative scrutiny). But many Hong Kong stars will surely repay such efforts. By sharpening the focus on acting, the poetics approach should also encourage scholars to spotlight not only the region's top-flight stars (e.g., Tony Leung Chiu-wai and Zhang Ziyi) but also the host of mid-range stars whose stardom is predominantly local or pan-Asian, and who consequently are overlooked by theorists preoccupied with transnational stardom (figures such as Nick Cheung, Louis Koo, Lau Ching-wan, Carina Lau, Lam Suet, Tony Leung Ka-fai, Karen Mok, Carrie Ng, Francis Ng, Sandra Ng, Eric Tsang, Anthony Wong, Simon Yam, Miriam Yeung, and others). Such analyses will surely debunk the fallacies about Hong Kong stars cited at the start of this chapter, and enrich not only our understanding of Hong Kong stardom but the burgeoning field of Asian star studies.

Notes

- 1 Quoted in Little 2000: 132. Tony Leung Chiu-wai has echoed Bruce Lee's statement, insisting: "I'm not a superstar. I'm an actor" (quoted in Martin 2014: 23).
- 2 This perspective is expressed by both professional and non-professional interview subjects in Leung 2007: 29; 31–32.
- 3 Author interview with Au Kin-yee (April 5, 2014, Hong Kong).
- 4 Personal communication with David Chiang (April 24, 2012).
- 5 This scandal was precipitated by the internet circulation of explicit images of Chen in flagrante with various female celebrities. The controversy led to Chen being blacklisted from the local film industry for several years. He launched an audacious comeback in 2014, making a cameo appearance as the bare-chested, crotch-scratching proprietor of a sex shop in star-packed comedy *Golden Chickensss* (2014).
- 6 For more information, see Chang (2005: 66), Tsai (2005: 116), Yu (2012: 4), and Chan (2014: 84).
- 7 Adherents of this view often endorse a simplistic juxtaposition: mainland China, they say, has great actors but no transnational stars; Hong Kong has transnational stars but no great actors.
- 8 Some Hong Kong films actively promote this conflation of character and star by naming the former after the latter. Thus Lau in *Infernal Affairs* is named for Andy Lau, the star playing the role. See Chapter 16 by Kin-Yan Szeto in this book for further discussion of such tendencies.

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Part V

Narratives and Aesthetics

Making Merry on Time

A Feast of Nostalgia in Watching Chinese New Year Films

Fiona Yuk-wa Law

As Hollywood blockbusters continue to hit the local screens with technologies such as IMAX and 3D, and Microfilms (*wei dian ying*) and YouTube become part of the daily life of city dwellers who are in possession of different kinds of electronic gadgets from smartphones to tablets, our cinematic experience expands its affective border to bigger and smaller screens. It is not a new story for different technologies in the development of motion pictures to produce new sensibilities; the medium itself has been making changes since its emergence over a century ago. The bilateral advancement towards both bigger and smaller screens indicates an interesting change in the way that the audience makes sense of the act of cinema-going. While we may be mourning the waning of affect and celebrating a new age of interactivity when the “public gathering” of cinema-going (to borrow from Miriam Hansen in her discussion of the making of an alternative public sphere in the reception of early cinema [Hansen 1991]) has transformed from taking place in the physical environment to a virtual milieu, we may need to re-examine the relationship between genre, audience reception, and temporality so as to revise our understanding of the cinematic experience. Technological advances mean that we can watch any film anytime and anywhere. But how do we make sense of the age-old urban ritual of going to the movie theater as a festive event? How do the new film-watching practices affect the transformations of cinematic genre as well as its connection to audience reception? To what extent is domesticity articulated, imagined, and regenerated in the punctual moment of festivity when cinematic images are consumed, celebrated, and enjoyed in the movie theater?

In Hong Kong, Chinese New Year has always been a festive period during which cinema-going is a social event. When most restaurants, shops, and other

places of recreation are closed for the annual holiday, watching movies is a major popular social activity, a way to spend the joyful time with family and friends in addition to enjoying the spectacles of the annual public parade and the New Year fireworks. A unique cinematic “genre” specifically made for and consumed by the local communities, Chinese New Year films (*he sui pian*) have always been guaranteed blockbusters in the Hong Kong film scene in the festive season. The carnival elements in these comic texts, and their timely release during the most important festival in Chinese society, have provided filmmakers with great chance to generate revenue by offering their audience a major holiday entertainment. By celebrating such a happy moment annually and habitually, most of these films reinforce the importance of home, community, and the affective relationships among people. However, the profound influence of Chinese New Year films has not been a popular subject of scholarly inquiry: underrated by critics, scholars, and even audience in terms of cultural value, these highly commercialized films are not simply purchasable entertainments; they show specific social and cultural phenomena that are found in Chinese societies like Hong Kong. The urban tradition of watching Chinese New Year films and the recent revamping of some of the well-remembered comedies into films such as *Fantasia* (Wai Ka-fai, 2004), *72 Tenants of Prosperity* (Chung Shu-kai, Eric Tsang and Patrick Kong, 2010), *All’s Well, End’s Well* series (various directors, 2009–2012), *I Love Hong Kong* series (various directors, 2011–2013), and *Journey to the West: Conquering the Demons* (Stephen Chow and Derek Kwok, 2013) etc., have suggested that cinematic nostalgia or the “ritualistic commemoration” of earlier cinematic images (Lai 2001) has continued to define Hong Kong cinema after the handover and the signing of CEPA with the PRC.

Instead of giving a generic account of the early Chinese New Year films, which I have briefly outlined elsewhere (Law 2010), this chapter will attempt to look closely at four *he sui pian*—Clifton Ko’s *It’s A Mad, Mad, Mad World* (1987) and *All’s Well, End’s Well* (1991), and Jeffrey Lau’s *The Eagle-Shooting Heroes* (1993) and *A Chinese Odyssey 2002* (2002) – in order to examine the sentimental attachment to different representations of home in these selected films, and the ways in which the filmmakers have carnivalized Hong Kong cinema in intertextual dialogues over the past two decades. Through a combination of theoretical discussion and historical accounts of the chosen films, this chapter examines how the festive cinematic experience of watching Chinese New Year films demonstrates the complex relationship between temporality, ritualistic behaviors, consumerist culture, the sense of locality, and the collective practice of Chinese traditions. Although this chapter is a discussion of the connection between Chinese folk traditions and contemporary media in the development of Chinese-language cinemas, such a perspective in looking at holiday/festive films could be extended to other kinds of festive genres, such as Christmas films and Halloween-related films. It offers a new approach to opening up understanding of the relationship between film exhibition, film genres, and audience reception.

The Festive Chronotope: (New Year) Cinema-going as an Urban Ritual

“Chinese New Year film” has become a generalized term to describe mainstream domestic blockbusters shown during the festive season. The Chinese phrase *he sui pian* (literally meaning “New Year celebratory film”) seems to be equivalent to describing the profit-maximizing potential of a corpus of films that can guarantee large audiences and box office income even before they are released. Although there seems to be agreement that Chinese New Year films should be comedies or action spectacles it seems impossible to categorize Chinese New Year films as a specific cinematic genre solely by their content. It might be claimed that Chinese New Year films exemplify a temporal genre or chronotopic genre, since the genre of the films is determined and defined not so much by their textual elements or styles as by considering the audience reception at a specific time. Other temporal genres are Christmas and Halloween films, released during a specific period of time and whose generic elements are related to this showing period.

Considering the temporal-generic elements in these blockbusters, it is found that they all cohere with the social atmosphere in which audiences watch these films: family time at Christmas encourages the showing of comedies and warm-hearted family melodramas; the horrific sentiments of Halloween lead to people enjoying festive terror collectively in the movie theater by watching horror films. Film viewing hence becomes a social event. Likewise, Chinese New Year films fit into such a category of filmic texts as they are intended for reception by an audience assembled during the special social time when people are enjoying family gatherings so that a collective sense of being Chinese is constructed, affirmed, and imagined. Cinema-going therefore makes possible the making of an imagined viewing community – in the context of a particular temporal, spatial, and cultural experience of Chinese New Year, local experience is immediately articulated, felt, imagined, and enjoyed in this urban ritual.

In general, the content of Chinese New Year films can be drawn from a range of genres, though there are some traditional taboos, mostly related to tragedies and horror. Taboo subjects include human separation, death, illness, monstrosity, and hideous images, so horror films and tear-jerking melodramas are seldom shown in this period. As tabooed topics cannot be completely avoided, these elements may be appropriated with a twist, for example, by turning the horror elements into comic ones, by providing farcical relief, parodic traits, and happy endings after tragic scenes. Generic hybridities, subversive and carnivalized plots and images are hence encouraged since genre is no longer a fixed systemization of cinematic texts but a gateway to open the text in a specific social time.

On the other hand, genres can be understood as indicative of a “typical situation or mode of behavior in the life of a community” in which “the presupposed motifs that were constitutive for the form and intention of a genre first become

comprehensive" (Jauss 1982: 101). This suggests that in fact generic formation, temporal transitions, and human activities are interdependent entities. The notion of time is inherent in the whole process of genrification, which is tied to the various social functions and human receptions. In temporal genres like Chinese New Year films, there is another aspect of time behind the texts – a temporary respite from routine life or the holidays. Cinemagoing has been a popular holiday entertainment or festive pastime. The time of screening, the time of genrification and the festive social time coincide, and this heterotemporality can be understood as the Bakhtinian notion of chronotope when the specific space of the movie theater is considered.

In fact, Bakhtin did not clearly define the meaning of chronotope, though it has been generally understood as a time-space, or temporal-spatial relationship related to everyday expressions. Vice (1997: 200–228) reads chronotope as being linked to the historical and generic interactions within a given text like paintings and films. She discusses chronotope in filmic texts as the various layers of time and space – the external history represented in the film, the film's own images of time and space, and the film's formal construction or metafiction (202–203). For other Bakhtinian scholars such as Morson and Emerson (1990: 367), chronotope can also be understood as a "way of understanding experience" based on the assumption that time and space are "intrinsically interconnected" (Bakhtin 1992: 84). It can be related to the study of genres, as the chronotope is to be found in the ways that genres represent events. Provided that the space is social, time is always biographical and historical, hence the cultural chronotope is defined as "a field of historical, biographical, and social relations" (Morson and Emerson 1990: 371). Stam suggests that this notion of the chronotope has the potential of historicizing the discussion of filmic genre because in addition to being the "backdrops" or contexts, chronotopes are the "ground from which narrative and characters emerge as the temporalization of human action" (Stam 1992: 11–12). Therefore, chronotopes are not contained in the plot since they are also the historical, biographical, and social relations that make the plots possible. Bakhtin even claims that "it is precisely the chronotope that defines genres and generic distinctions" (Bakhtin 1992: 85).

The interconnected chronotopes of Chinese New Year films are the festive time of Chinese New Year, the watching time of audiences, and the textual time within the filmic texts. All these "times" interact and criss-cross in order to generate a "genre" called Chinese New Year films. On the other hand, the festive chronotope does not only refer to the time-space of the festive time (Chinese New Year) and the (film) experience of consuming the temporal genres (Chinese New Year films), the dialogic relationship between festive holidays and capitalist culture (consumerism) has indicated a gradual ritualization of festivity through a collective habituation of certain holiday consumptions. In the following discussion, I attempt to explain how the act of watching Chinese New Year films as an urban ritual, and the pleasure of intertextuality, illuminate a unique and qualitative moment, or the punctuality of commemoration, which makes a new impact on the way we see the relationship between genre, temporality, and cinematic experience.

Locating Family Comedies from *It's a Mad, Mad, Mad World* to *All's Well, Ends Well*

Hong Kong as a geographical and historical marginal space is one of the Chinese societies where Chinese New Year has been most widely celebrated. The festive time has even evolved into a mediated cinematic space in the context of its colonial history and postcolonial situation. People come and go in this tiny city, especially during the waves of emigration and immigration since 1949. Hong Kong is thus an important location for the Chinese diaspora. The study of Chinese New Year films should be closely related to the diaspora. According to Peters (1999: 24), the notion of diaspora is quite suggestive for media studies in two ways. First, he addresses diaspora to the peculiar spatial organization of broadcast audiences, which is a social aggregate sharing "a common symbolic orientation without sharing intimate interaction" (Peters 1999: 24). Second, the German word for diaspora, *Zerstreuung*, can also mean distraction. Walter Benjamin remarks that the masses seek distraction rather than concentration in the age of mechanical reproduction (Benjamin 1992: 232–233). This German meaning of diaspora is quite relevant here: the idea of scatteredness describes both the spatial configuration of the audience and its attitude of reception. The diasporic experience within the movie-theater is like the experience of an internal exile when the subject temporarily drifts away from its mental concentration. This internal exile within the space of a movie-theater can facilitate an internal mediation between the subject and the cinematic images which results in the cinematic identification with the image based on a mimetic desire of human beings, as suggested by Girard (1988).

In the context of Chinese society, the movie theater is also the place where affective pleasure is attained and a sense of Chineseness is affirmed if our friends and families are sitting next to us at the time watching the same festive films during the New Year holiday. A sense of home is constructed while we consume the festive cinematic texts. We can even say that the movie theater can be understood as a temporary home in which the boundary of the private and the public is temporarily fused. The idea of home is in general built on select inclusions grounded in a sense of kinship or membership. Home is a place to escape to and a place to escape from; this shares a common quality with the experience of entering a movie-theater or the film-watching experience.

In addition to the homely theatrical space, the image of home has been a crucial and central cinematic element to Chinese New Year films. First, the image of home is commonly set in a narrative about homecoming. The Chinese New Year is in general a time for family gathering in the contemporary world, while ancient Chinese society saw this festive occasion as an important time for family reunion, especially for the numerous officials who could not work in their home town according to the imperial rule throughout the dynasties. Thus, this residual perception of festive family reunion is also based on a feeling of homesickness, or

nostalgia, that has been passed on to the contemporary world and become a traditional motif in cultural productions of the festive occasion. The collective festivity and nostalgic feelings enable the image of home to be re-created and re-presented – and not merely as an affective space of familiarity and safety. The representation of home is also embodied as a homely affect that is imagined through the spatial and temporal aspects of cinematic experience. This may also explain why, in addition to Jackie Chan's action spectacles, family comedies occupied a major generic assumption of Chinese New Year film during the 1980s and 1990s. The huge popularity gained by the low-budget *It's a Mad, Mad, Mad World* movies (1987, 1988, 1989) comes from their fantastic portrayal of how a grassroots family has their dream come true by luck – the winning of lottery ("Mark Six") – doubtlessly the dream of everyone. The lively comic elements come from the verbal gags, the mockery of the current affairs, and the funny episodic incidents encountered by each of the family members in an everyday context.

Premiered on Chinese New Year Eve in 1987, *It's a Mad, Mad, Mad World* is a tale of the fantasy and nightmare of the grassroots family in face of the fast growing economy and urbanization in Hong Kong. Living in the public estate with his family, Bill the father/husband (Bill Tung) is a news reporter who is often under pressure both from his job and his wife (Lydia Sum), who is addicted to playing mahjong and buying Mark Six. After winning the first prize in Mark Six, the family immediately leaves behind its grassroots lifestyle and enjoys the life of the *nouveau riche*. However, their flaunting of wealth attracts villains who kidnap their youngest daughter and the film becomes an account of the process of loss and finding – not only the daughter, but all their lucky money is lost due to the bankruptcy of the bank. Of course, as a festive comedy their worries must be solved before the closure when the daughter is found, money is redeemed and the family is united in a happy chorus.

Unlike high-concept blockbusters with costly visual effects or the attraction of movie stars, the comic effect of this series relies on a collaborative performance of a group of actors in a style that resembles *Enjoy Yourself Tonight*,¹ a popular TV variety show during the 1980s and 1990s. A communal sense of belonging is therefore transferred to and consolidated among the audience in the movie theater, which is transformed into a home-like affective milieu in which laughter is shared and disseminated. Contrary to this milieu of communal laughter in which individuals from various backgrounds can share the festive comedy, the film includes incidents that remind us of the class-conscious social reality in Hong Kong. One of the most hilarious examples comes from the wedding banquet in which the social hierarchy among different family members and relatives is displayed and contested. Having been disappointed by not being invited to take group family photo in the banquet, Bill later proudly announces his refusal to emigrate since he wants to contribute to the Four Modernizations in mainland China, while "emigration is irresponsible." This shocking declaration of staying in Hong Kong despite the migration wave among his middle-class relatives is ironically taken back when the grassroots family suddenly becomes rich. Although the accidental possession of wealth brings about

carefree material living, Bill begins to envision the potential dangers and nightmares of losing his money. Other than the emigration plan motivated by his actual fear of Chinese communism, he proposes a communist-like method of distributing money and resources equally among the family members on a daily basis in order to make sure their money can be spent through their lifetime. The actualization of fantasy is further subverted into real nightmare when their wealth does not guarantee safety because the bank goes into bankruptcy and their lucky money lures kidnappers. This family comedy about security, reunion, and happiness is in fact based on an underlying threat of losing everything, a truthful reflection of Hong Kongers' fears in face of the possible social changes after 1997. The happy ending and resolution of all the problems therefore functions as a stabilizer to unease and a wishful prophecy that it is hoped will come true, as illustrated by the film's Chinese title, which literally translates as "a compulsion to prosperity."

One can safely claim that the *It's a Mad, Mad, Mad World* movies are canonical Chinese New Year films in Hong Kong in recent decades because they represent the festive hope in an everyday context and an actualization of upward mobility through fantasy. The first, 1987, film presents a side-picture of how Hong Kong citizens responded to the handover that would only take place ten years later. The lucky-money motif is founded on a loving family and a positive outlook of the future, which were both traditional values and pragmatic concepts for the Hong Kongers who were facing an unclear future during the late 1980s because of the forthcoming handover. Throughout the series of three films, Bill has a number of dreams which illustrate the changing concept of home – in the first film, he dreams of a luxurious party in which the family is admired by their relatives who look down on them before they get rich. His youngest daughter presents her school-work – a model of a nuclear factory, which explodes, and Bill wakes up from his dream. The dream of flaunted wealth becomes a nightmare of nuclear explosion. This realistic reflection (as the Daiya Bay nuclear site was one of the sources of fear in Hong Kong at that time) shows that Hong Kong was far from being a safe home.

Bill's dream in the second episode is about the making of new home through a nostalgic contemplation. While resting in a flight couch and waiting to arrive in Canada, their destination of emigration, Bill recalls a moment in their previous life when the family, while living in a small rented room, received the government letter informing them that their application for an apartment in a public estate had been successful. They all happily go to take a look at their future home. The moment of transition between homes is an indication of a new beginning; as Bill exclaims, "We are starting over again." The repetition of making a new home is like the fate of Hong Kong – thinking back and forth from past to future, the 1980s is the period when the time of the present is always evaded, pushed out of sight. People like Bill are either nostalgic or forward-looking, and both attitudes only emphasize the emptiness of the present moment. The feeling of completeness and the desire for a family reunion seem to be incomplete and uncompletable tasks for Hong Kongers, who are always on the move.

Yet, the seemingly evaded present moment is devoted solely to earning money or the practicality of accumulating wealth. Hence, easy money gained through gambling or the lottery instead of hard-work is the ultimate dream. Unpredictable attributes such as chance, opportunity, and luck are needed and desired by the desperate Hong Kongers to cope with fear and uncertainty. The incalculability of chance and luck can also explain the vanity of possessing wealth. The bubble-like prosperity of Hong Kong between the late 1980s and the mid-1990s is not only a factual description of the city's economic status, it also reflects the mental condition of its citizens who were characterized by an ecstasy of ungraspable illusion of a money-built home, even though they might not be able to rationalize this anxious desire in the context of the city's imminent handover to Chinese sovereignty.

When one is extremely anxious about an unknown future, the best ways to reduce the stress are to laugh hysterically or to become nostalgic. At first sight, Clifton Ko's *All's Well, Ends Well* (1992) subverts the formulaic family comedy by recycling and carnivalizing the traditional plot of family generation comedies – light-hearted stories set in a domestic space in which all generations of a family are living together. Such a family environment is usually idealized and unrealistically represented in local media by the spacious domestic setting, usually a big house with several floors and a spacious garden, with family members living a carefree material life in this fantasized domestic space. The only problems found in such spatial and material settings are usually caused by the generation gap, unsatisfactory marriage, or other related family troubles among these members. Contrary to the situational comedy of the grassroots family in *It's A Mad, Mad, Mad World*, *All's Well, Ends Well* exhibits the problems found in the traditional family structure of the middle-class without touching upon the current social issues at that time. While a public estate is the site of festive family union in *It's A Mad, Mad, Mad World*, another idealized image of family is spatially represented by the capacious mansion in which the protagonists of *All's Well, Ends Well* live together, although such a house is a rare form of residence in Hong Kong. Although both types of domestic environment emphasize a sense of togetherness and community, the absence of neighborhood in *All's Well, Ends Well* perhaps suggests a more frenetic, enclosed family drama in which the audiences are embedded rather than being observers, like a nosy neighbor.

In addition to the box-office success, the reception of these two mirthful family comedies on the television circuits and in DVD sales in the following years reminds us of a similar cultural phenomenon – the famous Frank Capra film *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946), whose consumption has become part of the traditional social activity of American households during Christmas, thanks to its repeated showing on TV after the film entered the public domain in 1974 when its copyright failed to be maintained by production companies. Likewise, the popularity of Clifton Ko's festive films has been nurtured by the medium of television, which is a family and domestic medium. The watching of these films has also allowed the construction

of a cultural memory which is both collectively formed and personally felt. The collective knowledge about the films is created by the public space built by the TV broadcasting network, while there is also a personal memory about watching this film with families. The cinematic experience is hence transformed into a festive ritual in the domestic sphere.

In *All's Well, End's Well*, the three brothers (Wong Bai-ming, Leslie Cheung, and Stephen Chow) live together in a big house with their parents. Each of them encounters different problems in romantic relationships but they all achieve reconciliation by pairing with their beloved ones as the story proceeds. Family reunion and resolution between lovers take place when they are having a birthday party for the old parents at home. Ending with a familiar chorus song "*qi huan chang*" (齊歡唱, the clichéd lyrics meaning "singing together") usually found in old Cantonese films of the 1950s and 1960s, all the couples engage in a mass wedding ceremony. They also self-reflexively greet the audiences for the Chinese New Year. This self-reflexive greeting by looking directly into the camera is a conventional closure in the Cantonese operatic costume films of the 1950s and 1960s, in which all the characters engage in a joyful chorus. The singing of the blissful lyrics functions as a verbal transference of blessings and an expression of gratitude to the audience who have been enjoying their performance. Not only do the characters recognize the existence of the audience, they also declare themselves festive entertainers through this self-referential performance in the finale. By wishing the audience prosperity in the coming New Year, they also openly express their hope to enjoy good box-office in return.

All's Well, Ends Well is probably the best-known Chinese New Year film of the 1990s, with extremely successful box-office. However, its canonical status also partly stems from the fact that it is constantly shown on local TV channels every Chinese New Year. The farcical comic elements, most noticeably performed by Sandra Ng in her appearance as a worn-out, hard-working housewife, as well as Stephen Chow and Maggie Cheung in their exaggerated performances, continue to arouse hilarious responses from audiences even today. The film has even become a shared cinematic memory of Chinese New Year films among younger generations who grew up locally. Although the narrative structure and characterization are familiar and predictable, the film has anarchic features thanks to the incalculable comic elements performed by Stephen Chow in his nonsense (*mo lei tou*) comic style. Such anarchic exaltation is further accelerated by the childlike parents, who not only provoke laughter by their unexpected humor and emotionless facial expressions, but who also, by their on-screen presence, remind the audience of the traditional virtues of the good old days. The references to old Cantonese films are shown when the old parents (acted by Lee Hong-kam and Kwan Hoi-shan, who are themselves famous actors in earlier decades) are watching on TV old black-and-white Cantonese films in which they appear. On one hand, the Confucian value of family unity is projected onto these nostalgic references represented by the self-reflexive parental figures and predictable narrative closure. On the other

hand, surprises and mischiefs arising in the carnivalistic plays, such as gender switching, verbal jokes, and transgressive behavior, undermine the audience's familiarity with this generic structure. Traditional family value is affirmed and consolidated through a process of subversion after the family has undergone disintegration, switches, and restoration.

Despite the anarchic comic effects, vernacular tricks, and visual vulgarities that contribute to a local rendition of festive comedy, a theatrical linkage can also be discerned to the English title *All's Well, Ends Well*, which resembles that of a play by William Shakespeare. Although the film is not adapted from Shakespeare's problem comedy, the play's frivolous folktale elements, its oft-criticized incongruous plot and characterization can be compared to Clifton Ko's festive film. Stephen Chow's character as Shang Foon resembles the Shakespearean nobleman Bertram, as both of them are at first unwilling to accept a maiden's love, while the maidens, Helena in the play and Holliyok (Maggie Cheung) in the film, are the only persons who can cure the fatal sickness of the male protagonist. Other than the Shakespearean reference, the film also contains intertextual references to Hollywood films like *In Bed with Madonna*, *Pretty Woman*, *Ghost*, and *Misery*. The Cinephile Holliyok obsessively imitates the female protagonists in these films, and Shang Foon, in order to win her heart and body, dresses up as the matching male roles. These cinematic spoofs inject excessive comic elements, which simultaneously defy and celebrate traditions and conservatism.

Anachronizing Nostalgia in *The Eagle-shooting Heroes* and *A Chinese Odyssey 2002*

The notion of nostalgia re-emerged in the 1990s as a response to the social and political mutations related to the handover. But there is more to it than that. As Lai points out, Hong Kong cinema of the 1990s had a historiographic function of "ritualistic commemoration": through the collective consumption of "stock images and representational norms" spectators were able to immediately recognize past references so that the act of reception itself became the "the public medium of social beings" (Lai 2001: 231–250).

The pleasure of recognition is a celebration of the recovery of a "communitarian ethos" created by the collective affectivity towards their familiarity with the local popular culture (Lai 2001). This "heightened self-consciousness" rooted in the awareness and understanding of local cinematic conventions becomes the reason for filmmakers to recycle these images, characters, and motifs so as to recycle hopes and re-produce their own economic miracles, in the form of box-office success.

While intertextuality has been a crucial element of pleasure in our experience of enjoying popular texts, the notion of recycled culture is especially effective and constitutive in the temporal cultural heritage of festivals. The Chinese New Year

has been a time of consensus, during which all kinds of ritualistic repetitions are deemed normal and welcomed because they address a communal collaboration that upholds the social stability. Although Chinese New Year films have been generally understood as formulaic stories which celebrate traditional ways of filmmaking and cinemagoing, this ritualistic commemoration is essential in the production and watching experience of Chinese New Year film. It is because the notion of commemoration suggests not only spatial but also temporal togetherness by directing people's attention to the "specific forms of communication that tie contemporary people to a world that is gradually passing" (Lai 2001: 247). Hence, the watching of Chinese New Year films during this festive time is a double nostalgia – on one hand, the festive time recalls and recreates residual Chinese folk culture, which has been generally regarded as the ethnic root of Hong Kong; on the other hand, current social mutations rely a great deal on the nostalgic recall through popular images, so constructing a social solidarity and locality. This double nostalgia is then recycled annually in a different yet familiar fashion in order to secure the box-office. Hence, many Chinese New Year films since the 1980s have referred to earlier successes. Sequels or series of films were also commonly found, as in the case of *It's a Mad, Mad, Mad World*. The repetition and recollection involved in the making and watching of these Chinese New Year films are therefore part of the process of constructing the cinematic canons which in turn classify and define themselves as what ought to be called Chinese New Year films.

At the same time, the specificity and locality of Hong Kong cinema is formed in this differentiating process of repetitions. As Lai points out, the genre recycling and transformation based on the use of existing images and imageries is a practice of enigmatization. This means that through the "selection and reorganization of existing images from popular culture," the local audiences are distinctly selected as a "privileged hermeneutic community" so that a state of "internal dialogue" is facilitated to distinguish "those within from the 'outsiders' by making who partakes in a shared history of popular culture" (Lai 2001: 232). This classification or criterion of membership through the recognition of a shared popular or social memory is especially important in locally or communally consumed cinematic texts like Chinese New Year films. Nostalgia becomes not only a postmodern stylistic that re-presents certain historical moments, as Fredric Jameson proposes; it is also a generic sentiment that strategically frames a ritualistic commemoration linked to the construction of social solidarity. Hence, the so-called local cultural identity of Hong Kong is always a bracketed membership through the "remembrance of a shared popular tradition" (Lai). At the same time as local film critics, filmmakers, and even the general public were blaming the formulaic repetitions of these cinematic images for the lack of creativity, they were enjoying these familiar images and participating in the enigmatization of the local community.

Director Jeffrey Lau is well-known for his festive recycling of images and narrative motifs among his own works or in playful response to Wong Kar-wai's films. While his films *A Chinese Odyssey Part I* and *II* (1995) are dialogic aftermaths of

Wong Kar-wai's *Ashes of Time* (1994) in terms of the ways affective relationship is dealt with, *Ashes of Time* and Lau's *The Eagle Shooting Heroes* (1993) are originally the twins – as Wong and Lau intended to make as two prequels to Jin Yong's novel.² For various reasons, *The Eagle Shooting Heroes*, released in the Chinese New Year of 1993, becomes the prequel of *Ashes of Time* since it was released nearly two years earlier than Wong's film. Being a prequel of the prequel, *The Eagle Shooting Heroes* is completely detached from *Ashes of Time* and Jin Yong's original novel, except for the names of the characters.³

In order to compete for the Chinese New Year market, *The Eagle Shooting Heroes* was promoted as an uncouth merrymaking through an extravagant, anachronistic story about Jin Yong's characters. Spectators are obliged to completely abandon their knowledge of the canonical martial arts novel originally set in the thirteenth century, since the characters, wearing costumes of the contemporarily fantasized Arabian and Indian styles, are involved in a new story about the carnivalesque process of the recovery of the kingdom. The story begins with the conspiracy of Chaozhou dialect-accented Ouyang Feng and his cousin to overthrow the Kingdom of Jinlun/Kingdom of the Gold Wheel. They kidnap the king and force a priestess (Maggie Cheung) to work for them. Knowing her home country is in danger, the Third Princess of Jinlun (Brigitte Lin) seeks help from her martial arts master so that she can reclaim the homeland. During this process, the characters get to know each other in the comic twists-and-turns of revenge, mistaken identities, and romance.

Unremarked by most audiences and critics, this film actually exemplifies the process of homecoming, an important motif of Chinese New Year films, in addition to the festive title *Dong Chen Xi Jiu* (東成西就, meaning "prosperity everywhere"), which is a self-reflexive pun on the Chinese title of *Ashes of Time* (*Dong Xie Xi Du* 東邪西毒, which refers to the nicknames of the two protagonists). The Third Princess's recovery and reclaiming of the homeland from the traitors' hands is a nostalgic attempt to get hold of a lost origin. She refuses to seek help from her fiancé (portrayed by Tony Leung Kar-fai as Duan Zhixing, or the South Emperor, the emperor of Dali) because she wants to succeed through her own unaided efforts. It is her journey to get the Scripture of Nine Yin (*jiu yin zhen jing* 九陰真經) and learn the advanced martial arts skills that drives this jolly-folly adventure.

Nostalgic sentiment or homesickness is represented stylistically by intensive intertextual references to old Cantonese films of the 1960s. For example, revenge and reclaiming of the country through learning an advanced martial arts skill is a constant motif in the oldies. The costumes, bodily and verbal expressions of Leslie Cheung and Joey Wong are directly referring to earlier Cantonese films acted by the screen-couple of Chow Dat-wah (曹達華) and Yu Su-qiu (于素秋, which is also the name of Joey Wong's character in the film). The cousins-as-lovers (Ouyang Feng and his cousin; Hong Qi and his cousin) or senior-junior-as-lovers (the Princess and Huang Yaoshi; Huang and Yu) are common romantic patterns in old martial arts films and melodramas. Also, the obviously low-tech, special-effect-free three monsters (clearly played by human beings in costume) in the badly-made

cave clumsily expose the cinematic fantasy of the pre-digital era. The inserted sing-song sequence performed by Leslie Cheung and Tony Leung Kar-fai, who is in disguise as a songstress, is another parodic re-presentation of the style of acting in Cantonese oldies, which was first expressed and re-introduced in Lau's earlier film *92 Legendary La Rose Noire* (1992). Comic, festive, and communal laughter is therefore generated by the local audiences who know well where these nostalgic imitations come from. The laughing crowd is the collective emotional response aroused in this carnivalesque film, which is in stark contrast to the alienated loneliness and melancholia in Wong Kar-wai's later film based on the same story.

In addition to the playful excess of these stereotypical generic elements and the underlying motif of homecoming, *The Eagle Shooting Heroes* introduces a process of dream-come-true, which is an essential emotional supplement needed in the festive period. The film actually begins with someone pursuing their dreams. First, Ouyang Feng dreams of being the emperor. In order to make this dream come true, he overthrows the existing emperor and sets off to seize the imperial seal from the fleeing Third Princess, who is determined to take revenge and recover her country. However, Ouyang Feng, as the villain of the narrative, does not achieve this goal; in the process he is degraded as the slave-like companion of Hong Qi with the swollen grotesque lips. On the other hand, Duan Zhixing dreams of becoming an immortal and he believes that he would reach nirvana with the help of a "whole-hearted person" (*zhen xin ren* 真心人), thus he sets off for his journey. The film is in fact a combination of different journeys in which each protagonist is pursuing their dream. Instead of showing the spirit of *wuxia* (righteousness, kindness, and faith), which is a common motif in the martial arts novels, this re-interpretation or re-creation of a de-hierarchical and de-canonized *jianghu* illustrates an affective space of hope that subverts the traditional beliefs while stressing the spirit of individualistic aspiration to future in a festive chronotope. In the final combat, Duan returns from nirvana and transforms himself into the immortal Jigong (濟公). He helps the characters in defeating Ouyang Feng through a hybrid of martial arts styles inspired from various cultural sources such as Georges Méliès' magical tricks, Cantonese mahjong, and special effects from old Cantonese cinema. Even idioms for Chinese New Year blessings are re-represented and embodied as actions.⁴ This transformation of fighting into greeting, as exclaimed by Hong Qi ("Why is their fighting becoming an offering of New Year greeting?"), is ludicrously performed by the immortal Duan who even distributes red pockets to everyone. The solemn martial arts genre is mutated into a festive party.

This intertextual festive party takes place again in Lau's later film, *A Chinese Odyssey 2002* (2002). The narrative is set in the Ming Dynasty, in which the young Emperor (Zhang Zhen) and his sister (the Princess, acted by Faye Wong) escape from the oppressive palace for fun. The imperial court, as well as the royal family, are practically under the control of their mother, acted by Rebecca Pan – whose motherly figure reminds one of her performance in Wong Kar-wai's *Days of Being Wild* (1990)

as an overbearing mother. In their adventurous journey, the Princess meets Li Yilong, or “Bully the Kid” (Tony Leung) while the Emperor meets Li’s sister Phoenix (Vicki Zhao). Romance between the four characters develops as mistaken genders and identities are interwoven into comic and tragic scenes.

Actually this story is a mixture of two traditional folk tales commonly used as the basis of Chinese regional operatic pieces. Adapted from Peking Opera, *You Long Xi Feng* (游龍戲鳳) or *Mei Long Zhen* (梅龍鎮) is a romance between the Ming Emperor incognito as common man and a beautiful restaurant owner, Phoenix. The second folk tale is found in Huangmei opera (黃梅調) as *The Butterfly Lovers* (*Liang Shanbo Yu Zhu Yingtai* 梁山伯與祝英台), which is about the tragic romance between the poor scholar, Liang, and the rich girl, Zhu, who acts in disguise as his male classmate. Both folk tales were made into extremely popular Huangmeixi films with tear-jerking tragic conclusions – *The Kingdom and the Beauty* (Li Han-hsiang, 1959) and *The Love Eterne* (Li Han-hsiang, 1963); they also exemplify the high-point of Shaw Brothers’ productions in the musical genre. In Lau’s festive version, there are also scenes when the Princess and Li sing in Huangmei style. The uses of traditional Chinese musical styles and the cinematic references to earlier popular blockbusters create a festive nostalgia by which a familiar joyful mood is transmitted to those audiences who know these earlier texts. For younger audiences, this film also introduces these old-styles in new ways by inserting anachronistic elements in the narratives, like the use of glass-bottles and folded chairs as weapons (a loose reference to the *Young and Dangerous* series) in the fighting scenes, the Emperor’s smoking of a cigarette and Phoenix’s wearing of high-heels etc. The traditional Chinese festivity is then transformed into these hybridized styles of new and old.

Being an anachronistic rendition of traditional folklores and Shaw Brothers’ productions, this film is also an add-on response to Lau’s earlier *A Chinese Odyssey Part I and II* and Wong Kar-wai’s *Ashes of Time*. Quotations and intertextual references are obviously found, frequently used and even referred to in the narrative so as to create a discursive multiplicity. For example, upon the escape of the Princess there are different versions told by the eunuchs about how she accomplished it. There are also different versions of the embrace between the Princess and Li, as quoted from their memoirs and the innkeeper’s memoir which are said to be “published” later. The denials and doubts about the true story echo with the motif of a “true yet illusive love,” the “mirage destiny” (*jing hua sui yue* 鏡花水月), or Fata Morgana between the Princess and Li, that love must be seen and felt from a reversed view. Like a riddle, the illusive true love can only be materialized into the real by switching the subject positions and exchanging subjectivities, so that one is able to feel what the other feels when being in love. After the Empress dowager’s disapproval of the Princess and Li’s marriage, the Princess becomes “mad” by acting and speaking like Li – her subjectivity is completely replaced by her lover’s. To cure her lovesickness, Li must become the Princess (performatively, by uttering her lines) and the couple should wear the wedding rings in reversed roles (the Princess wears the dragon ring and Li wears the phoenix ring).⁵

As the figurative riddle in the film goes, love “flourishes under a peach blossom tree” (*tao hua shu xia qian li en yuan yi xian xian qian* 桃花樹下千里姻緣一線牽). The peach blossom tree has been previously found in Jeffrey Lau’s *Treasure Hunt* (another Chinese New Year film in 1994) in which the flowers visualize the fruitful romance between the protagonists. “Peach Blossom” is also a character in *Ashes of Time* (Carina Lau) who suffers from lovesickness. In Chinese tradition, peach blossom represents the destined romantic love between human beings. Its fruit (peach) symbolizes the Taoist belief of immortality and longevity, or the popular belief of having offspring and thus a continuous growth of the family-tree. The symbolic meaning of the peach blossom is then imbued with a sign of regeneration in the riddle, but also with spatial settings: first in the palace, which is signaled by the peach blossom tree that only blossoms after the Emperor and the Princess have formed their families; then as the other peach blossom tree is located next to the river where Li and the Princess affirm their love at the end of the film. The blooming of the peach flowers converts romantic love into traditional values of family and unity.

Family unity, one of the essences of Chinese New Year films, is also a major theme in *A Chinese Odyssey 2002* through a process of homecoming. The film starts as Li returns to his home town after two years of self-exilic wandering caused by his failed love affair. His encounter with Principal Chan (acted by Jeffrey Lau) during the fight in the wild triggers his nostalgic sentiment. Li suddenly has an epiphany of returning home while he is being beaten by Chan and watching the falling leaves – the visual metaphor for the Chinese expression of *luo ye gui gen* (落葉歸根, “fallen leaves should return to the root of a tree,” meaning a nostalgic yearning for the ultimate homecoming after years of absence from home). On the other hand, the Emperor and the Princess try their best to leave home and live a free life without family control. These characters’ temporary absence from home can be seen as a part of the homecoming process because home as an affective space has to be felt and perceived from a distance. Suggested by the Chinese title of this film, (*tian xia wu shuang* 天下無雙, meaning the uniqueness of a certain quality that nothing else in the world can replace), home, love, and the sense of Chineseness are actually perceived as purely subjective affections that differ in different individual’s view as they are articulated carnivalistically.

Claustrophilic Festivity: Celebrating Cinematic Experience

In the festive chronotope, the movie theater has been schizophrenically lived as an affective space of involvement and escapism where individuality and collectivity are being constructed and felt simultaneously. Audiences identify with the cinematic form in relation to their personal experiences. They are also making sense of the familiar festive milieu in the movie theater through a claustrophilic experience – a

cognitive reliving of an enclosed space in which collective affects and private emotions are mediated, recreated, and luxuriated through the cinematic images projected on screen in festive punctuality. As Acland aptly describes this ambivalent identity of the film audience, that “[r]esting momentarily, balanced between the ‘safety’ of home and the public of crowds, the film audience – that abstract creature of industrial and creative discourse – might be apprehended as an intermediacy between our private and public selves” (Acland 2003: 231). Instead of seeing the confined darkness in the movie theater as a captivating, claustrophobic space, one might give credit to the brewing of affection in such time-space (re)configurations as claustrophilia.

Film watching, as a mass or collective cultural consumption, is both public (with hundreds of people sitting together inside the dark theater) and private (when each individual is watching the film as an individual in the dark), no matter which type of screen is mediating the filmic images. Kracauer suggests that the film experience “tend[s] to weaken the spectator’s consciousness” though “organic tensions,” “nameless excitement,” or “mental vertigo” in the midst of darkness in cinema (Kracauer 1997: 159). He notes that there is a dissolving and forgetting of the self while the spectator is consuming the cinematic images projected on the screen. A cinematic unconscious is established in this vulnerable condition when the spectator identifies with the projected images and narrative contents. A cultural unconscious about a timely feeling of homecoming is therefore produced and realized in such circumstances constructed among the collective spectatorship during the festive time. There is not only an intersubjective relation between the film and the audience but also among the audiences when certain emotion or sensation is activated and shared in the cinematic experience. While Zhang Zhen (2005) explores the anarchic energy of the cinematic *mise-en-scène* in her study of early martial arts films, in which audiences are energized to traverse the imaginary world through this particular genre, my current discussion of Chinese New Year films acknowledges the cinematic locale as the crucial site of emotional production. The timely acquisition of festive images allows the merry-making social time as both concentrating and distracting, and the images themselves become the channels through which the audience rediscover themselves at the beginning of a year. With the ongoing evolution of cinematic projection, this claustrophilic experience should warrant a further analytical stratification that goes beyond the scope of Chinese New Year films.

Cinemagoing is therefore best illustrating a claustrophilic festivity. Chinese New Year films, like the New Year Eve dinner, can be understood as a feast of visual images that welcomes everyone. The movie theater or the screen itself then becomes the carnival square where communal performance (film) is consumed. Bakhtin notes that the carnival squares, being “limited in time only and not in space,” are “places of action” or “meeting- and contact-points for heterogeneous people” (Bakhtin 1984: 128). Although there cannot be much interaction among audiences who watch the same film even in the same movie theater, these people

are generating an imagined bond of spectatorship. The collective viewing of these filmic texts is a feast-like combination of physical consumption (visual consumption), social activity (being with friends and family), economic consumption (buying tickets and perhaps snacks), and affective generation (laughter and pleasure) in a specific moment of bracketed time (festive time) during which everybody is a participant. This “absence of footlights” between the stage and off-stage space sets the ground for a special condition for a “universal spirit” (Bakhtin 1968: 7). Instead of being a mere spectacle, the carnival is a lived experience that “embraces all the people” (Bakhtin 1968). As with the notion of the imagined communities in Benedict Anderson’s (1991) study of print capitalism, cinemagoing during the festive time is not only a visual consumption that supports the economy and film industry. It is also an act of upholding familial bonding (as one of the Chinese New Year activities), reliving cultural memory, and affirming a collective experience in which the spectators are more than passive receivers of cinematic images.

When every audience is a participant of a film, there is no distinction between author and reader/audience. Indeed, the existence of authorship in this festive chronotope is often impossible to discern. Gadamer asserts that just as festivals only exist in their celebrations, a text “exists only as an event that reveals the reader’s self” (Machor and Goldstein 2001: 2; Malpas 2014). This stance is taken by scholars of reception studies like Jauss, who encourages the emphasis on the audience’s “horizon of expectations” (Jauss 2001: 23), among many other aesthetic horizons or experiences, like the productive, receptive, and communicative experiences from which aesthetic pleasure is generated. The differences and distances between these horizons have dialogically constituted a “renewed interplay” and “horizon of a new experience” (Jauss 2001: 25). This generative or regenerative nature of textual consumption echoes with Bakhtin’s discussion of dialogism in his study of the novel.

In these concluding remarks, I would suggest that the collective watching of Chinese New Year films is even more complicated, multilayered, and heterogeneous when hundreds of audience members are having the cinematic experience together in the movie theater during the festive time. A time of generosity, consumption, excess, unity, and emancipation, the Chinese New Year is more than a time of peaceful anchorage. It is a critical moment of liminality without any urge of critical discourse. On one hand, it signals a time of renewal and progress when the calendric cycle starts over again. People habitually evaluate their good and bad deeds they did in the previous year when the old year is about to fade out, while summaries or reports are drawn to capture the significant lessons one has learnt and experienced in foreseeing improvements and resolutions to come. On the other hand, the absence or suspension of severe criticisms during this festive moment is celebrated when the carnivalistic social atmosphere urges everyone to put aside anger and negative emotions at least temporarily. A utopic worldview of open-mindedness is established and cherished so that people can prepare for the challenges to come in the New Year. This tolerance and generous acceptance has

interestingly nurtured the popular reception of the oeuvre of Chinese New Year films despite the fact that people would probably denounce the formulaic repetitions and the lack of aesthetic values of this temporal genre when the festive time has passed. We are all doomed in the gaiety of this claustrophilic festivity.

Notes

- 1 *Enjoy Yourself Tonight* (or EYT) aired on TVB (Television Broadcasts Limited) every weeknight from 1967 to 1994. It is one of the longest-running live shows in Hong Kong.
- 2 According to Lau, Wong would make the first part and he would be responsible for the second part or the sequel. However, as Wong did not complete the production schedule on time, Lau rushed to begin shooting and finish *The Eagle Shooting Heroes* with the same casting structure in 27 days in order to fill up the release period of Chinese New Year that was reserved for *Ashes of Time*. From two interviews (Dengtu 1993 and Lu 2002).
- 3 Only Jacky Cheung plays the same role (as Hong Qi) in both Wong and Lau's films, while Leslie Cheung interestingly acts as the Sinister East in Lau's film and as his rival (the Malicious West) in Wong's film, and other actors simply mix up their identities in the two films.
- 4 Traditional phrases like *dong cheng xi jiu* (東成西就, meaning "prosperity"), *long ma jing shen* (龍馬精神, meaning "good health"), *ru yi ji xiang* (如意吉祥, meaning "wish comes true"), *sheng yi xing long* (生意興隆, meaning "good business"), *huang cai jiu shou* (橫財就手, meaning "easy fortune"), *fu xing gao zhao* (福星高照, meaning "luck"), etc.
- 5 In traditional beliefs, the dragon is an archetype for the male role while the phoenix represents the female.

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A Pan-Asian Cinema of Allusion

Going Home *and* Dumplings¹

Bliss Cua Lim

The notion of “pan-Asian cinema” crystallized in the aftermath of the 1997 Asian financial crisis and the downturn experienced by the film industries of Hong Kong, China, Taiwan, and Japan (Davis and Yeh 2008: 85–86; Teo 2008: 343–344). Its inception thus coincides with a broader tendency towards “market-led” regionalization in Northeast and Southeast Asia, which saw an increasingly “integrative market for culture,” even as the project of forging a unified “Asian” identity faltered (Otmazgin 2013). It should be noted, though, that this contemporary variant of pan-Asianism – strongly rooted in economic integration and the flow of commodities – is distinct from earlier culturalist notions of Asianism articulated from the late nineteenth century to the first half of the twentieth century by figures like Tenshin Okakura, Rabindranath Tagore, and Sun Yat-sen as an ideological bulwark against Western encroachment (Ge 2000; Korhonen 2008).

According to Darrell Davis and Emilie Yueh-Yu Yeh, the term “pan-Asian cinema” encompasses a range of film-related practices: “talent-sharing, cross-border investment, co-productions (which may be unofficial, or backed by formal treaties), and market consolidation, through distribution and investment in foreign infrastructure” (Davis and Yeh 2008: 85). A model of “economic cooperation and co-production” between film producers in neighboring Asian countries, pan-Asian filmmaking has been dubbed a “survival strategy” (Teo 2008: 345), one that hopes to consolidate the currently fragmented Asian film market into a vast regional audience. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that film producers in neighboring Asian countries, who once conceived of each other as rivals, have in recent decades embraced “co-operation and regional consolidation” (Davis and Yeh 2008: 85, 91, 93; Teo 2008: 351). What Nissim Otmazgin refers to as “regional media

alliances" (2013: 36) took the form of co-financing and co-production between Asian film industries. As Caroline Hau and Takashi Shiraishi point out, co-financing was nearly negligible in the 1980s and 1990s, when "less than three per cent of films were co-financed" in the Hong Kong film industry. In contrast, "co-financing exploded in the years 2004–6, when 38, 55, and 51 per cent of films were co-financed" (2013: 83). In the same period, the roster of Hong Kong cinema's financial partners expanded to include investors from not only mainland China, Taiwan, and Japan, but also the US, South Korea, Macau, Thailand, and Singapore.

Seen from a globalist lens, pan-Asian tactics attempt to push back at Hollywood dominance. This bears out Leo Ching's argument that "regional discourse does not operate independently: it is always directed against another territorial discourse" (2000: 239). Global Hollywood casts a long shadow over pan-Asian cinema. In interviews, pan-Asian filmmaker Peter Ho-sun Chan has voiced his dream of consolidating the currently fragmented Asian film market into a vast regional audience: excluding China, Chan estimates that the combined total population of key Asian markets approaches 300 million (Jin 2002). 300 million estimated consumers is the very figure that anchors the Hollywood film industry's huge domestic market, even as a globalized Hollywood becomes increasingly dependent on overseas revenue (Davis and Yeh 2008: 92–93).

Seen from a regionalist lens, on the other hand, pan-Asian film production tries to find "a new way to put Asia together as a market" (Davis and Yeh 2008: 91) and yearns to cultivate the enormous and potentially lucrative audience base of mainland China (Teo 2008: 345; Curtin 2010: 119). A quintessentially regionalist cinema (Hau and Shiraishi 2013: 78–81), Hong Kong, with its historical reliance on Southeast Asian markets and its long history of regional co-productions dating to the 1950s, was well-placed to strongly articulate a vision of pan-Asian media production in response to the decline of its domestic market and demand from Southeast Asia and Taiwan since the 1990s (Lim 2006: 349–351). The first commercial realization of the pan-Asian model in the Hong Kong film industry was Applause Pictures, co-founded in 2000 by a team of industry players: Peter Chan, Teddy Chen, and Allan Fung. The pan-Asian cinema initiative launched by Applause Pictures drew on financiers, directors, actors, production, and post-production personnel with ties to Singapore, Korea, mainland China, Thailand, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Taiwan, and Japan (Davis and Yeh 2008: 94–95).

A Pan-Asian Cinema of Allusion?

The two films considered in this paper, *Going Home* (Peter Chan, 2002) and *Dumplings* (Fruit Chan, 2004), originated as episodes in the anthology franchise *Three* (2002) and *Three...Extremes* (2004). Early examples of Applause Pictures' pan-Asian model, these two films are rarities in the emerging corpus of pan-Asian

cinema. Whereas most pan-Asian films deracinate, deliberately minimizing cultural and historical specificity in order to maximize broad market appeal, *Going Home* and *Dumplings* foreground cultural and historical embeddedness through their allusions. This essay grapples with that tension between deracination on the one hand and cultural and historical specificity on the other in these two allusive pan-Asian films.

For Stephen Teo, pan-Asian cinema's intentional erasure of cultural nationalisms in the service of historical forgetting are exemplified by two Hong Kong-Chinese co-productions, *The Promise* (Chen Kaige, 2005) and *Perhaps Love* (Peter Chan, 2005) (Teo 2008: 354–355). Eschewing the “effacement of cultural nationalism” (Teo 2008: 354–355) that Teo incisively identifies as a hallmark of pan-Asian filmmaking, *Going Home* and *Dumplings* conspicuously foreground culturally and historically embedded allusions to traditional Chinese medicine (*zhongyi*), Maoist and post-socialist Chinese history, and bilingualism (Cantonese and Mandarin, or *putonghua*) in narratives overtly concerned with the blended lives of mainland physicians who travel between mainland China to the north and Hong Kong to the south, denizens of a porous border zone (Yeh and Ng 2009: 150).² In a nutshell, I suggest that the antinomy between these pan-Asian films' attempt to inclusively address a broad audience through tactics of deracination on the one hand, and the potential exclusion of viewers unfamiliar with its cultural and historical references, on the other, are contradictions internal to the workings of a nascent pan-Asian cinema of allusion exemplified by *Going Home* and *Dumplings*.

In an essay conceptualizing allusion as an “expressive device” deployed by the New Hollywood cinema of the 1970s and 1980s, Noël Carroll defined allusion as

an umbrella term covering a mixed lot of practices including quotations, the memorialization of past genres, the reworking of past genres, homages, and the recreation of ‘classic’ scenes, shots, plot motifs, lines of dialogue, themes, gestures, and so forth from film history, especially as that history was crystallized and codified in the sixties and early seventies (Carroll 1982: 42).

As distinguished from New Hollywood allusionism, allusion in pan-Asian filmmaking expands its intertextual purview beyond the formalist, film-historical, auteurist references listed by Carroll, evoking wider-ranging cultural and historical associations that are recontextualized, reversed, or otherwise transformed. In *Going Home* and *Dumplings*, allusions also carry affective power: both films are infused with conflicted nostalgia from the perspective of post-handover Hong Kong or post-socialist China. In particular, *Dumplings* – by thematizing sex, cannibalism, and abortion – serves up a startling affective mix of horror, shock, dark humor, and raunchiness.

Allusionism typically includes some audiences while excluding others; this is the elitism of indirect reference. The ideological project of pan-Asian cinema, however, retools allusion. The incipient pan-Asian cinema of allusion pioneered by Hong

Kong's Applause Pictures is bifurcated in its mode of address: first, in an inclusive gesture, films like *Dumplings* and *Going Home* attempt to consolidate regional viewership and speak to translocal audiences through their play with genre. Yet, both films offer a second, more exclusive layer of perceptual pleasures to select "insider" audiences in possession of relevant cultural competencies and reading protocols.

The two films' foregrounding of traditional Chinese medicine is fascinating in this regard, since it combines both inclusive and exclusive forms of audience address: on the one hand, traditional Chinese medicine commands a certain translocal legibility among regional audiences in East and Southeast Asia, even as its specific circumstances in Communist China may be unfamiliar.³ Traditional Chinese medicine shops abound in Southeast Asian countries like Singapore, Thailand, and the Philippines (*People's Daily* 2000a, 2000b), and aspects of traditional Chinese medicine have been integrated into the medical traditions of Korea, Japan (*kampo*) (Yu, Takahashi, Moriya et al. 2006:231–239) and Indonesia (*jamu*; the majority of *jamu* manufacturers in Indonesia were historically Peranakan Chinese). An iconic example of the regionalization of Chinese medicine is Tiger Balm, a popular menthol- and camphor-based therapeutic ointment whose initial marketing campaign is described by Sherman Cochran as an early twentieth-example of "pan-Asian transnationalism and transculturalism" (2006:122).

In contrast to the regional familiarity of certain forms of Chinese medicine, the specific histories of Maoism and market socialism, which form a dense connotative web in *Going Home* and *Dumplings*, are likely to be decrypted only by those knowledgeable about its contexts in mainland China and Hong Kong. So traditional Chinese medicine, as addressed to Asian regional audiences, is both legible and foreign, familiar and unfamiliar: the uncanny of pan-Asian allusionism. In these films, the "spectacularization" of traditional Chinese medicine in the visual track (lingering lateral tracking shots of herbs being chopped and decocted in *Going Home*) or on the audial track (pointed conversations about traditional remedies in *Dumplings*) may function simultaneously as an opaquely foreign, exotic motif for audiences unfamiliar with traditional Chinese medicine, while simultaneously being read as "authenticating" intertextual gestures by cultural insiders.

In contrast to the deracinative quality of most pan-Asian filmmaking, *Going Home* and *Dumplings* are so culturally specific that key elements – traditional Chinese medicine, Maoist and post-Maoist Chinese history, and Cantonese/Mandarin bilingualism – are likely to be at least partially opaque or illegible to audiences who are not cultural insiders. That perceptual difficulty is acknowledged in an interview with prominent pan-Asian director-producer Peter Chan. Chan's interviewer remarks that *Going Home*'s focus on traditional Chinese medicine renders the story inaccessible and implausible to Western audiences:

the approach of Chinese medicine in *Going Home* is really different from the Western one... We couldn't make this story possible in Western countries because people would not really accept what this doctor is doing to his wife. Did you take that

into consideration when you did *Going Home*, this approach of Chinese medicine? (Francois and Sonatine 2003).

In response, Peter Chan downplays the tendency of such references to fence out certain viewers. For Chan, *zhongyi* (traditional Chinese medicine) is merely “a way of telling a story... I was hoping the audience would just believe in the story that I’m telling not because of Chinese medicine, but because of love.” Chan explains that he was hoping to entice audiences with a hybrid genre film that opens as a horror film, mutates into a psychopathic thriller, and ends as a melodrama (Francois and Sonatine 2003). Chan downplays the differential degrees of legibility or unfamiliarity that *Going Home* might elicit among different regional viewers, hoping instead that the foreignness of *zhongyi* to some audiences might be mediated by the global legibility of genre films.

Going Home and *Dumplings*, two accomplished pan-Asian films, experiment with an incipient pan-Asian cinema of allusion. Both films aspire to an appropriate balance between regional and global legibility (achieved through genre) and cultural embeddedness (allusions to traditional Chinese medicine, Maoist and post-Maoist history, and the asymmetrical relationship between Mandarin and Cantonese). In what follows, I unpack the contours of that gamble.

Going Home and Zhongyi Histories

Going Home opens with a prologue in antiquated photographer’s studio from the 1950s or 1960s. An anonymous man poses for a studio portrait in a kitschy interior *mise-en-scène* whose columns, balustrade, drapery, fake foliage, and painted backdrop (see Figures 18.1a and b) recall the studio conventions of long-exposure photography in the Victorian era (Benjamin 1977: 46–51). Linking spectrality to image technologies, the prologue establishes several of the film’s most important motifs. At key moments in the film, being dead is likened to becoming an image: the ghostly presence of a three-year-old girl dressed in red is signaled by graffiti on the apartment building where most of the action unfolds. Throughout the film, the co-presence of the dead with the living comes through in images: in graffiti, photographs, VHS tapes, and mirrors. The newly dead, we learn by the end of the film, come to the photographer’s studio to have their portraits taken before moving on. That the ghost-girl initially declines to pose for a photograph foreshadows the refusal of both living and deceased characters in *Going Home* to accept the verdict of death.

The prominence of mirrored and glass surfaces highlights a preoccupation with opacity, transparency, and reflectivity on the film’s image track. *Going Home* plays with conventions of continuity editing to suggest that the glass door of the studio is only selectively transparent. In a recurring pattern of alternating shot/reverse

(a)



(b)



Figure 18.1 In *Going Home* (Peter Chan, 2002), the newly dead come to the photographer's studio to have their portraits taken before moving on.

shot taken from either end of the axis of action, a shot from within the photographer's studio looks out through the glass onto a bright street scene outside. It is then followed by an exterior reverse shot looking into the same photographer's studio, our vision obstructed by a locked steel door (see Figures 18.2a and b). In such exterior reverse shots, the once-transparent window has become a one-way mirror, allowing those on the inside to look out, while obstructing the view from

(a)



(b)



Figure 18.2 The glass door of the photographer's studio is transparent when seen from the interior. However, our view of the same door is obstructed when viewed from the exterior.

the outside in. The old-fashioned photographer's studio is death's waiting room, its door marking the threshold between life and death. The dead can see into the world of the living, but the living are, for the most part, blind to the dead.

Going Home introduces a world inhabited by socially marginal figures in present-day Hong Kong. Newcomers to a low-income neighborhood, a divorced policeman, Wai (Eric Tsang) and his young son, Cheung (Li Ting-fung) move

into a dilapidated apartment complex that most of the residents have abandoned. Interestingly, *Going Home* was shot on location in “old police quarters in [Hong Kong’s] Western District” (Cheung 2009: 93). The little boy Cheung and his father meet their neighbor, Yu (Leon Lai), who is said to be caring for his paralytic wife, Hai’er (Eugenia Yuan). Shots of Yu preparing herbs and roots or dragging heavy garbage bags oozing a brown sludge to the garbage dumpster establish Yu as a doctor of traditional Chinese medicine, framing that occupation in decidedly sinister terms. Such devalorization of *zhongyi* physicians at the beginning of *Going Home* is, strictly speaking, unrealistic: as Judith Farquhar has pointed out, traditional Chinese medicine is currently very popular in China’s market economy (2002: 27). We see Yu alone with his wife, who sits eerily still and silent in the bathtub while he chatters excitedly about their trip back to mainland China in four days’ time to celebrate Chinese New Year. Since the only shots of Hai’er moving or speaking are conveyed through her reflection in a mirror, we begin to suspect that Yu’s wife is dead and that he is hallucinating her responses; death is again linked to particular types of visuality (see Figure 18.3).

Costuming contributes another layer of uncanniness to character exposition. Assuming that the mainland characters’ ages are approximately those of the actors playing them, Yu and his wife Hai’er are in their mid to late thirties during the story’s temporal setting in the early 2000s. They belong to a generation that older mainlanders disparage as the “spoiled children of the [market] reform era,” who grew up during China’s shift towards a capitalist market economy in the 1980s. The mainland couple’s drab, desexualized clothing, however, is strikingly anachronistic,



Figure 18.3 The only shots of Hai’er (Eugenia Yuan) speaking are of her reflections in mirrors or her recorded image on videotape.

reminiscent of the “unisex trousers and jackets of the Maoist era,” that gave way to “markedly gendered clothing” in the late eighties (see Figure 18.4; Farquhar 2002: 15–16). The Maoist inflection of the mainland couple’s anachronistic appearance in 2002 evokes the asceticism and collectivism of the pre-1980s Maoist ethos instead of the conspicuous consumerism of today’s oxymoronic “socialist market economy.”

After the spectral little girl lures the policeman’s son to the photographer’s studio, the cop mistakenly suspects his neighbor of having kidnapped his son. Policeman Wai breaks into his neighbor Yu’s apartment and discovers the latter’s morbid secret. For the last three years, the *zhongyi* physician has been caring for the immaculate corpse of his beautiful wife, bathing her daily in herbal remedies. Yu overpowers the policeman in his apartment and holds him captive. Revealing that he and Hai’er were both *zhongyi* physicians, Yu promises to free Wai in three days’ time, when his wife revives. A heated altercation between policeman Wai and the *zhongyi* doctor Yu follows, which explicitly compares traditional Chinese medicine to “Western” biomedicine: When Wai points out, “Your wife is dead!,” Yu replies, “Western science would agree with you. But her tumors can be driven out. If I immerse her in Chinese herbs every day, she’ll revive when she’s well.” “Tumors? Revive?” asks Wai, incredulous. “You’ve strangled her.” “I strangled her to cure her,” the doctor of Chinese medicine retorts, struggling to maintain his composure. At this point in the film, the *zhongyi* practitioner appears as an impoverished, outmoded, homicidal madman. Traditional Chinese medicine here contrasts unfavorably with biomedicine (Bates 2006: 37), as pointed up through Yu’s exchange with the skeptical policeman.



Figure 18.4 The mainland *zhongyi* doctors’ anachronistic costume is reminiscent of the desexualized clothing of the Maoist era.

What we now call “traditional Chinese medicine” is a complex, reified myth produced out of a protracted encounter with “Western” biomedicine (Zhan 2009:12; Lei 2002: 357–358). Healing practices indigenous to China, formerly referred to simply as medicine (*yi*), became ethnicized and temporalized as *traditional Chinese medicine* (*zhongyi*) only after China’s charged encounter with science in the second half of the nineteenth century. Chinese medicine was denigrated by the modernizing, reform-minded Chinese intellectuals of the May Fourth period’s New Culture Movement (1917–1927), who championed biomedicine as necessary to modern China. It was from the perspective of a reactive championing of biomedicine as new or Western medicine (*xinyi* or *xiyi*, respectively) that the therapeutic know-how present in China prior to the early twentieth century was reframed as a type of medicine that was quintessentially Chinese (*zhongyi*), anachronistic (*jiuyi*, old medicine), and national (*guoyi*, national medicine) (Zhang 2007: 19–20).⁴

During the era of the nationalist republic in China (1912–1949), Sun Yat-sen’s Guomindang (Kuomintang; KMT) actively strove to abolish the old medicine. In 1914, the government banned *zhongyi*, calling it a vestige of the feudal Confucian culture that modern China must leave behind. The establishment of the Communist-ruled People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 inaugurated a drastic change in official attitudes towards *zhongyi*, now relegitimized in ideological terms as nationalist, mass-based, anticolonial, antifeudal, and anti-elitist. A period of institution-building for *zhongyi* practitioners followed in the 1950s, a decade that closed with Mao’s famous comparison of *zhongyi* to “a great treasure house” for China (Zhang 2007: 20).

In both *Going Home* and *Dumplings*, then, the persistent association between traditional Chinese medicine and the Maoist era alludes to this conflicted history and to the Communist regime’s historical support of *zhongyi* (Zhang 2007: 18–20, 22). The anachronistic costuming of the *zhongyi* physicians in *Going Home* alludes to vexed questions of temporality invoked by both critics and adherents of *zhongyi*, simultaneously prized as a reservoir of tradition and derided as an anachronistic obstacle to modernization (Zhang 2007: 152). The point here is that, in contrast to the effacement of cultural nationalism that typifies pan-Asian cinema, the emphasis on *zhongyi* in *Going Home* foregrounds competing varieties of cultural nationalism, not just between Hong Kong and the mainland, but within mainland Chinese history itself, as in the conflicting visions of China articulated by both the KMT and the Communist party.

On the long-awaited day of Hai’er’s revival, the temporal pressure is acute. The police have discovered that both Wai and his son Cheung are missing; Yu, their only neighbor, is under suspicion. Realizing that Hai’er is about to revive, Yu frees Wai, apologizing for imprisoning him while they awaited Hai’er’s return to life. Too late: the police raid Yu’s apartment and arrest him, just as his long-dead wife blinks for the first time.

The wordless montage that follows, heightened to an emotional pitch by a plaintive violin leitmotif adapted from the opening bars of Georges Bizet’s “*Je crois*

entendre encore” (“I still believe I hear [your voice]”), is strongly ironic. Hai’er comes back to life just as her husband is arrested. Sitting handcuffed in the police car, Yu watches incredulously as his wife, alive at long last, is taken for dead and carried out in a metal coffin. Yu escapes, chasing after the vehicle that is taking Hai’er to the morgue. While standing in the street, he is run down by a car and killed.

In the wake of Yu’s death, three highly expository scenes chart the cop’s dawning understanding of the couple’s painful ordeal. In the first of these scenes, a forensic pathologist tells the cop that although Hai’er has been dead for a few years, her strange (*zhiguai*) body remains lifelike, with no sign of decay. The next scene shows Wai listening to a biomedical doctor recount his treatment of the couple during Hai’er’s pregnancy three years earlier. The physician reveals that the pregnant Hai’er had been diagnosed with liver cancer and forced to abort their child. Ironically, Hai’er’s husband had also been diagnosed with liver cancer three years prior to Hai’er’s illness, but claimed that “Chinese medicine had cured him.”

The pronouncements of the forensic pathologist and the couple’s biomedical physician uphold the magical efficacy of *zhongyi* and solicit our sympathy for the strange mainland couple, who are belatedly humanized in our eyes by their ordeal. In contrast to the sympathetic *zhongyi* doctors, the forensic pathologist and the biomedical physician whom Wai interviews are faceless, filmed in long shot or from behind the shoulder. The detached, rational objectivity of Western medicine ultimately proves less efficacious than the obsessive, necromantic love of the *zhongyi* practitioners. The denouement not only attests to the necromantic couple’s extraordinary faithfulness in love but also vindicates their faith in traditional Chinese medicine.

Zhongyi’s capacity to “defy a death sentence” through a clinical miracle is crucial in establishing its legitimacy against the authority of biomedicine. Mei Zhan explains that clinical miracles, particularly those involving late-stage cancers, operate in an explicitly comparative frame, demonstrating *zhongyi*’s incredible ability to treat diseases that biomedical therapies had pronounced incurable (Zhan 2009: 93–94). By vindicating Yu’s seemingly superstitious therapeutic practices, *Going Home* admonishes the skeptical cop (a surrogate for the skeptical audience) that *zhongyi* works. Despite its legitimizing function, however, the clinical miracle by definition signifies marginality, further positioning *zhongyi* as a fringe practice in relation to biomedicine and science (Zhan 2009: 101).

The film’s final scene completes the cop’s (and the spectators’) retrospective understanding of what has happened. The videotapes piled by Yu’s TV set are labeled with dates ranging from 1997 to 1999, placing Yu’s death and resurrection within the temporal range of the handover of Hong Kong to China. The cop watches Hai’er’s final video letter to her husband, captured on VHS tape shortly before she died (see Figure 18.5a, b, c). Recorded over a used tape of her ministering to Yu over the preceding three years, Hai’er’s tape has been replayed hundreds of times as Yu turned to it for reassurance. Watching it, we realize that Hai’er tended to her dead husband’s corpse in the same way years before, bathing his body in medicinal herbs until he was resurrected. The video quality is poor and grainy because, unlike digital recording formats, the image quality of analog video

(a)



(b)



(c)



Figure 18.5 The policeman, Wai (Eric Tsang) watches Hai'er's video letter to her husband, recorded between 1997 and 1999.

degrades with use and re-recording. As Lucas Hilderbrand points out, the degeneration of videotape over time and use indexes the tape's generationality and bears the durative imprint of its circulation (2009: 7). The distortion and degradation of Yu and Hai'er's well-worn VHS tapes – over-dubbed, watched too much, and loved too well – attest indexically to the couple's repetitive sharing and devoted re-screening of their own excruciating tale of love and misfortune.

Chan's short film continues the most striking motifs of the ghost wife in East Asian literature and film: the necromantic romance as a framework for pursuing the question of faithfulness in love in the context of historical change, epitomized by Stanley Kwan's 1987 film *Rouge* (Chow 1993; Lim 2001). Over the last two decades, critical paradigms surrounding the inscription of local Hong Kong history in supernatural narratives have emphasized reflectionist readings in relation to the 1997 handover and the dovetailing of the spectral with the nostalgic. Though such an approach has arguably become a critical commonplace, it does remind us that at a crucial juncture the ghost film registered the singularity of Hong Kong's fateful return to mainland Chinese governance, a return that both refused to conform to prevailing narratives of nationalist decolonization and highlighted a sense of both time and place as recalcitrant to linear chronology and homogeneous space (Lim 2009: 182–188). As a post-handover film, *Going Home* at once revisits some of the concerns of nostalgic ghost allegories made prior to 1997 as well as gesturing towards the regionalist/globalist aspirations that coincided with Hollywood's frenzied remaking of the "Asian horror film" in the following decade.

Going Home actors Leon Lai and Eric Tsang and cinematographer Christopher Doyle (in a cameo) had collaborated on a prior Peter Chan film, the 1996 melodrama *Comrades, Almost a Love Story*, a film that also considered the vexed pre-handover relationship of Hong Kong and the mainland via New Hong Kong cinema's thematic of border crossing (Yau 1996). *Going Home*, however, introduces an interesting departure from this prior intertextual template: here, the mainland couple who migrate to Hong Kong are homesick *zhongyi* physicians. In two parallel, equally problematic moves, the film figures China as a repository for outmoded medical traditions while portraying Hong Kong as a place of inevitable death for mainland Chinese migrants. The mainland protagonists die repeatedly in the port city, ultimately unable to go home. Such representational logics are not only temporalized by the ghost film's spectral time (Lim 2009: 151–155), but also exemplified by a figure – traditional Chinese medicine – that emerges as translocal and transtemporal by definition.

Dumplings: Medicinal Meals and Cannibal Allegories

Director Fruit Chan underscores the local and historical specificity of the Hong Kong setting in *Dumplings*. The decrepit Kowloon building where much of the film is set, Chan speculates in an interview, dates from "the first generation of

public housing in Hong Kong” (Trbic 2005). Esther Cheung has noted the centrality of abandoned public housing estates in the cinema of Fruit Chan’s films, such as *Made in Hong Kong* (1997), *The Longest Summer* (1998), and *Dumplings*. These dilapidated tenements are home to the most disenfranchised and marginalized subjects: migrants, the aged, and the poor. Cheung writes:

The housing estate in *Dumplings* is in Shek Kep Mei. It is the oldest type of public housing in Hong Kong, shabby, poor, and nearly forsaken... The derelict low-cost housing estates in *Dumplings* have become sites of [the] secret trafficking of desire,... done between Hong Kong and a southern city in China [Shenzhen] where postsocialism has generated cultural flows beyond anyone’s control (Cheung 2009: 118).

In the feature-length version of *Dumplings*, a tarty-looking young woman who calls herself Aunt Mei (Bai Ling) carries a tiffin lunchbox across the Shenzhen border into Hong Kong.⁵ She unpacks its enigmatic contents in the privacy of her own kitchen in a run-down public tenement in Shek Kep Mei. While marinating the plump, shrimp-like ingredients in ginger water, Aunt Mei decides to eat one raw (see Figure 18.6). Though the kitchen scene is wordless, jarring noises on the soundtrack and the orange-pink of the curled dumpling meat cue the audience to sense that the freshly made, delectable-looking dumpling meat is abject. In this scene, as with the rest of the film, *Dumplings*’ spectatorial positioning is the opposite of conventional mirroring identification in genre films. Rather than encouraging spectators to mirror the protagonists’ pleasure in eating, the film solicits a negative affective response toward eating in most filmgoers for the duration of the film.



Figure 18.6 Aunt Mei (Bai Ling) eats raw dumpling meat in *Dumplings* (Fruit Chan, 2004).

Mrs. Li (Miriam Yeung), an incongruously well-dressed woman who desperately wants to recover her youthful appearance in order to stop her husband's philandering, arrives at the dilapidated tenement. When Mrs. Li asks to sample Aunt Mei's famously expensive dumplings, Aunt Mei boasts about the efficacy of her dumplings, emphasizing that true cures must be eaten. Obliquely yet unmistakably, this first conversation between the two women, the aging bourgeois Hong Kong housewife and the provocatively dressed young cook from mainland China, links eating to the promise of rejuvenation.

Food and medicine are closely linked in Chinese thought through nutritional practices (Farquhar 2002: 49); as such, the pervasiveness of medicinal meals in *zhongyi* and in Chinese everyday life is woven into the film's details. Mrs. Li's maid prepares tonic soup and black chicken; her high society friends, noticing her glowing, youthful appearance, speculate that she has been eating a diet of sheep placenta, reishi mushrooms, or snow lotus; and her husband, Mr. Li (Tony Leung Ka-fai) regularly eats boiled eggs that contain fertilized duck embryos, believed to boost virility and referred to by Filipinos and Malaysians as *balut*.

Only by degrees do we learn what Aunt Mei's anti-aging dumplings are made of. Our worst suspicions are confirmed in a scene set in a Shenzhen hospital, where Aunt Mei meets with the nurse who supplies her secret ingredient. Aunt Mei's dumplings, we realize with horror, are made out of human fetuses. Aunt Mei and the nurse were co-workers when the former was a practicing physician on the mainland. When her friend asks her why she broke up with her lover from those days, Aunt Mei (who is really Doctor Mei) replies that he was uncomfortable with the large number of abortions she conducted under China's one-child policy. While North American viewers tend to see the film's horrific representation of abortion in the context of debates over women's reproductive rights (pro-choice versus pro-life movements), the film's allusions signal a critique of the one-child policy and practices of sex-selective abortion and infanticide in mainland China.

Established in the late 1970s as a form of family planning and population control, the one-child policy was in place in the PRC (the Special Administrative Regions of Hong Kong and Macau were exempted) until changes relaxing the policy were announced in 2013 (Levin 2013).⁶ Abortions were legal under this policy, although sex-selective abortion, infanticide, and abandonment of unwanted children were not. Nonetheless, the cultural preference for sons, operating in tandem with the one-child policy, meant that female-selective abortion was widespread in China, resulting in a highly uneven sex ratio at birth (men far outnumber women; BBC News 2000). According to one estimate, about four million female fetuses have been aborted in China since the 1980s (Miller 2006: 514–517). As Yeh and Ng incisively point out, Aunt Mei is an abortionist-cum-cannibal entrepreneur who turns a profit from serving unwanted fetuses from China's one-child policy to wealthy Hong Kong clients eager for eternal youth (Yeh and Ng 2009: 152–153).

In *Dumplings*, Aunt Mei's explicit reference to the one-child policy and to the old collectivist adage, "serve the people," add to an accumulating store of allusions to Communist Chinese history in the diegesis. Revolutionary icons of Maoist China are prominent in the eclectic collection of knickknacks on Aunt Mei's sideboard; these purely visual allusions are never named in dialogue (Lu 2010: 184).⁷ Chuck Kleinhans usefully identifies the figures revealed in a panning shot as follows (see Figure 18.7):

Mei's collection of figurines includes (l. to r.) a female "barefoot doctor," emblematic of the early revolutionary era when young volunteer semi-professionals went out to rural areas to deliver basic health care to the peasants. Chairman Mao Tse-tung in a salute, the Catholic Virgin Mary, several versions of Guan Yin... Also in the foreground, a cat teapot with the spout being its upraised paw. Continuing to pan right: a figure of a peasant militia woman with a Red Guard armband, marking her from the Cultural Revolution Era (1966–76); another Buddha and a Hello Kitty making the familiar beckoning gesture of the Maneki Neko (Japanese Fortune Cat)... (Kleinhans 2007).

Clustered references to Maoism occur on the visual track rather than in dialogue, thus relying on the capacity of certain spectators – but not others – to recognize Maoist allusions in the film. Though Aunt Mei looks like a woman in her thirties, too young to have experienced the Cultural Revolution firsthand, a photograph taken in 1960, when she was 20, reveals that Mei is now actually 64 years old



Figure 18.7 Visual allusions to Maoist-era figures among Aunt Mei's eclectic collection of knickknacks: on the left, a female "barefoot doctor," and Chairman Mao Zedong; on the right, a peasant woman wearing a Red Guard armband.



Figure 18.8 Though Aunt Mei looks like a woman in her thirties, too young to have experienced the Cultural Revolution firsthand, a photograph taken in 1960, when she was 20 years old, reveals that Mei is actually 64 years old in the narrative present.

(see Figure 18.8). Aunt Mei is thus a living repository of socialist histories and an emblem of what Ackbar Abbas calls “posthumous socialism” in China:

Even China’s description of itself – as a ‘Socialist Market Economy’ – is a catachresis... Are we dealing with another phase of socialism? Or, as is often said in the West, is China today capitalist in everything else but name alone? Or, more paradoxically, are we dealing with neither the life nor the death of socialism, but with its afterlife? With a posthumous socialism, more than a post-socialism... Socialism in posthumous form can have a vitality stronger than ever before (2012: 11).

Abbas’s notion of posthumous socialism – a revenant possessing a “vital afterlife” in the People’s Republic – captures the sense of anomaly, of catachrestic aberrance, and anachronism (2012),⁸ embodied by Aunt Mei in *Dumplings*. Aunt Mei has a penchant for singing a revolutionary opera song, “Waves after Waves in Hongshu Lake,” (Kleinhans 2007: 5) that functions as a musical leitmotif in *Dumplings*. Aunt Mei refunctions the 1960s revolutionary song into a quasi-magical incantation of private enterprise, sung while her clients eat their macabre medicinal meal. Characterizing Aunt Mei as a “former red guard and current wild capitalist” who now serves as a “midwife” for an “extreme version of neoliberalism” in the era of market reform, Lu Tonglin convincingly reads the film as a scathing critique of the complacent coexistence of Maoist and post-Maoist histories within neoliberal consumer cultures in Hong Kong (Lu 2010: 194–196).

Aunt Mei is herself a product of such histories, having lived through various historical benchmarks: high Maoist socialism, the market economy, and the

post-transitional period following the handover of Hong Kong governance to China. In contrast to the Cultural Revolution's barefoot doctors (Valentine 2005; Zhang and Unschuld 2008), who were depersonalized embodiments of the socialist healthcare system, the economic liberalization that followed Dengist marketization from the late 1970s onwards saw the emergence of the private entrepreneurial (*getihu*) physician (Farquhar 1996: 246–247). Unlike the mainland doctors in *Going Home*, however, who trained purely in traditional Chinese medicine, Aunt Mei in *Dumplings* straddles both biomedicine and *zhongyi*, just as she regularly crosses the Shenzhen border between Hong Kong and mainland China. Her career change – from a biomedical doctor under Maoist rule to an entrepreneur of medicinal cannibalism in contemporary Hong Kong – complicates *Going Home*'s more stereotypical depiction of China and *zhongyi* as traditional and Hong Kong as contemporary.

Aunt Mei has lived through the Cultural Revolution, possibly as a barefoot doctor or as a Red Guard, like the figurines in her living room (see Figure 18.9). Allusions to her Maoist past color memorable shots of her and her clients eating, with great relish, her fetal dumplings. This spectacular indulgence of the appetites – for food, for youth, and for sex – is diametrically opposed to the collectivist asceticism of the Maoist era. The conflicted coevalness of Maoism and neoliberalism in both Hong Kong and mainland China is on grim display in the film's cannibal feast.

In an interview on the set of *Dumplings*, director Fruit Chan explicitly links the medicinal meal to socially-accepted forms of therapeutic cannibalism, as exemplified



Figure 18.9 A shot of Aunt Mei beside her sideboard, prominently featuring the figurines of Chairman Mao, a female “barefoot doctor,” and a female Red Guard.

by the mother's ingestion of her baby's placenta after delivery (Chan 2006).⁹ Though Fruit Chan's examples are taken from China, recent journalistic coverage reveals that human placenta continues to be ingested for its supposed therapeutic effect in both Japan (Schaffer 2008) and Britain (Fearnley-Whittingstall 1999: 25–26). Tragically, the fictional *Dumplings*, based on Lilian Lee's novella, "The Dumplings of Yue Mei's Attic" turns out to have been chillingly prescient. In May 2012, the *Los Angeles Times* and other newspapers reported that 17,000 pills smuggled from China into South Korea and ingested as "health tonics" were composed of 99.7 percent human tissue, believed to have come from stillborn babies and aborted fetuses – mostly female – from China's one-child policy (*Los Angeles Times* 2012).

The pursuit of youth and beauty is at heart a temporal fantasy: the dream of denying age, arresting time, and escaping change. In *Dumplings*, it also involves a perverse temporal reversal: a 64-year old woman regularly feasts on the unborn. This overturns the gendered, socially-validated practices of filial cannibalism of past centuries (*gegouliaoqin*) (Yue 1999: 69) to which *Dumplings* alludes, in which virtuous young women, usually daughters-in-law, cut off a portion of their own thigh to cook and serve to their husband's ailing, elderly, and protein-deprived parents (Chong 1990: 93–99).¹⁰ The valence of cannibalism in China is thus (at least) two-pronged: on the one hand, like the incest taboo, cannibalism is a radical violation of the social order that re-inscribes the norm through its transgression. On the other, filial cannibalism is also "the ultimate gesture of social unity and filial devotion" (Rojas 2002). Though I have been considering the feature-length version of the film here, the shorter version of *Dumplings* released as part of *Three...Extremes* effects an even more striking reversal of the gendered and generational dynamics of filial cannibalism. Whereas young women throughout Chinese history have sacrificed their flesh for their elders, in the final scene of the shorter release version of *Dumplings*, a monstrous mother devours her own firstborn son.

In the feature-length version of *Dumplings*, Mrs. Li slowly becomes more and more like her dumpling supplier: a cannibal gourmand, her cravings intensify, and she presses Aunt Mei to procure the rarest, most expensive, and most potent delicacy of all: a five-month old fetus. Acceding to her wishes, Aunt Mei performs a dangerous and septic abortion in her own kitchen on Kate (Miki Yeung), an impoverished teenage girl molested by her own father. Kate bleeds to death after the abortion, collapsing in her mother's arms on a public street. In addition to foregrounding the film's critique of class inequalities (Kate's death contrasts sharply with the aseptic conditions of the hospital abortion performed on Mr. Li's mistress) (Johnston 2005), the chilling abortion scene establishes Aunt Mei's cruelty towards other women.

As several commentators have noted, *Dumpling's* emphasis on cannibalism as an allegorical vehicle for social critique owes a clear intertextual debt to a long discursive history of cannibalism in Chinese culture. This is most apparent in Aunt Mei's

monologue in defense of cannibalism in the feature-length version of the film, heard mostly as an offscreen voice-over:

You should never consider cannibalism immoral in China. It has existed since history began. Li's *Herbalist Handbook* clearly stated that human flesh and organs are admissible ingredients for medical recipes.

During famines, neighbors traded and cooked each other's children for survival. The famous chef Yi Ya heard that his emperor wanted to try human flesh. He butchered and served his son as a course to the monarch. Tales abound of caring sons and daughters cutting off flesh for their parents' medicines. The classic *Water Margin* depicted heroes who savored their enemies. One even served buns with human flesh filling. The Japanese have definitely eaten many Chinese. You think our country could have got through all these wars and famines without consuming human flesh? What about out of pure hatred – to skin you and eat you alive? Our national hero Yue Fei once wrote, "Pep up with a meal of the invaders' flesh. Celebrate with a drink of the invaders' blood." When two people are deeply in love, all they desire is to be inside each other. Inside each other's guts.

Aunt Mei's monologue is paired on the image track with overlapping editing of several shots that repeat, from various camera perspectives, the same sight: Aunt Mei serving dumpling soup to first time customer Mr. Li, a visualization of the logic of repetition-and-difference underpinning her own erudite recital of literary and historical allusions. In the context of the diegesis, Aunt Mei's monologue functions as an exercise in self-justification addressed to a new client. Extra-diegetically, this speech is directed at the audience, explicitly alerting us to the film's conscious use of what Carlos Rojas calls a "shared discourse of cannibalistic allusions" with deep historical roots in Chinese culture (Rojas 2002). As Lu persuasively argues, *Dumplings* recalls the most influential allegorical treatment of cannibalism in modern Chinese literature, Lu Xun's short story, "Diary of a Madman" (Lu 2010: 188), which similarly referred to cannibalism in the Chinese classics. *Diary of a Madman* is widely considered a germinal expression of "anti-traditionalism as a revolutionary ethos" in the May Fourth movement (Tang 1992: 1222).

Published in 1918, "Diary of a Madman" chronicles the diarist's escalating paranoia as he becomes convinced that everyone in his community, including his own brother, is a cannibal. Once the diarist comes to his first epiphany, "they eat humans, so they may eat me," his perspective both on his immediate family and China's millennial history changes. Realizing that cannibalism has been practiced since "ancient times," the madman discerns a two word injunction between the lines of history books and Confucian classics: "Eat people" (Lu 1960, 1972). Read allegorically, the well-known anti-traditional stance of Lu Xun as a May Fourth writer comes through most clearly in the diarist's desperate plea to the cannibals around him to break with China's feudal past. This allegorical reading of "Diary of a Madman" has become canonical: Lu Xun's story is acknowledged to be a scathing

indictment of the desperation and brutality to which China had devolved in the late imperial and post imperial period, becoming a “terrible self-cannibalistic China” that preys upon its own weakest citizens (Jameson 1986: 70–74). The story ends on a despairing note as the madman worries that the future itself might be irredeemably compromised by cannibalism: “Save the children...” (Lu 1960, 1972) To Lu Xun’s exhortation in 1918, *Dumplings* in 2004 offers a pessimistic rejoinder: cannibalism is a thriving transborder economy a century later; far from being saved, children are eaten before they are born. In representing contemporary consumer culture in Hong Kong and mainland China as cannibalistic, *Dumplings* inherits a line of social critique that runs from the May Fourth era to Maoist revolution to economic liberalization. But whereas Lu Xun’s madman voiced the May Fourth critique of feudal Confucian tradition, Aunt Mei deploys the discursive history of Chinese cannibalism to legitimize neoliberal rationality (Lu 2010: 194).

On the level of individual authorship, the incongruity of oppositional filmmaker Fruit Chan’s involvement in the pan-Asian *Three* franchise has been noted by several critics (Johnston 2005; Lu 2010:179). True to his auteur persona as an independent filmmaker seeking “to create [an] alternative space within the mainstream” (Cheung 2009:32), Fruit Chan delivers in *Dumplings* an acerbic critique of the neoliberal imperative. In *Dumplings*, all the protagonists are simultaneously antagonists; rather than focalizing the film around a virtuous and victimized moral center, the central characters are all calculative, entrepreneurial, neoliberal cannibals. Set adrift without a morally ascendant hero to identify with, viewers confront Aunt Mei, an extreme version of what Wendy Brown dubs *Homo oeconomicus*, a citizen–subject called into being by neoliberal governmentality (Brown 2003).

Multilingualism, Pan-Asian, and Pan-Chinese Cinema

In a 2002 interview for the *Harvard Asia Quarterly*, Jin Long Pao asked Peter Chan whether or not “Asia’s linguistic diversity” should be considered a “barrier” to pan-Asian cinema. Peter Chan replied:

A lot of people will tell you the problem is language, but I strongly disagree. Hollywood films control 80 percent of the market share in Asia, and they are in English. And don’t kid yourself, not everybody reads and speaks English in Asia – a lot of people read subtitles. And then you say it’s because people are used to English due to years of exposure to American movies. But then again, why can’t they get used to the Thai language or the Korean language? (Jin 2002).

Citing the success of subtitled Hollywood films among Asian audiences who are not conversant in English, Peter Chan implicitly adverts to translational processes (e.g., subtitles) in maintaining that linguistic differences pose no

real obstacle to the success of pan-Asian cinema. This might explain the pronounced use of multilingualism in certain pan-Asian film projects spearheaded by Applause (see Knee 2009 for a discussion of multilingualism in *The Eye* [Pang Brothers, 2002]).

The transborder narratives of *Going Home* and *Dumplings* feature bilingual Chinese protagonists who converse in Cantonese (the lingua franca of Hong Kong) and Mandarin Chinese (standard Mandarin or *putonghua* is the official language of both China and Taiwan and is based on variants spoken in northern and southwestern China). In *Going Home*, the married couple from the mainland, Yu and Hai'er, converse only in Mandarin with one another, while the Hong Kong-born policeman Wai speaks only Cantonese throughout the film. Dr. Yu, the husband, alternates between Mandarin and Cantonese when talking to the policeman. In *Dumplings*, Mrs. Lee always speaks in Cantonese to Aunt Mei, who replies to her Hong Kong clients in Mandarin peppered with snatches of Cantonese.

Interestingly, there are no scenes of overt translation in either *Going Home* or in *Dumplings* because the principal characters are assumed to be bilingual. One character begins a conversation in Cantonese to which another protagonist replies in *putonghua*, without the need for a third person to act as a translator or and without recourse to a shared third language. The ease with which the bilingual conversations occur between characters, coupled with the seamlessness of monolingual subtitles that do not identify the languages being spoken, all work to efface the work of translation and the presence of multilingualism for audiences unfamiliar with how these different languages sound. For moviegoers who can't distinguish between the sound of spoken Mandarin and Cantonese languages, the characters are conversing in the same, undifferentiated Chinese.

Failing to hear the play of Cantonese and Mandarin in either film, however, means missing a rich layer of meaning in the transborder narrative. Language selection in cinema has always been political in the context of the linguistic heterogeneity of "Greater China." The establishment of Communist rule in China in 1949 led to the devaluation of all other Chinese languages as "dialects" and the official adoption of *putonghua* for all mass media forms (Pang 2010: 149). In such a context, as Lo Kwai-cheung emphasizes, the "idiosyncratic use" of Cantonese by Hong Kong people, "its intractability to the taming by standard Chinese," is an inscription of local identity that becomes even more significant in the post-handover period. If the 1997 handover of Hong Kong governance to the PRC inscribed a problematic fantasy of "reunifying a Chinese subject," then the co-presence of Cantonese and Mandarin in *Dumplings* and *Going Home* highlights the internal contradiction and cultural heterogeneity that Hong Kong introduces to the presumed stability of "Chineseness" as a racial-cultural-national category of identity (Lo 1998: 152–153).

Though diegetically concerned with character relationships between Hong Kong locals and migrants from mainland China, neither *Going Home* nor *Dumplings*



Figure 18.10 Establishing shots of Aunt Mei's tenement read as a visual pun, since "fourth floor" is a homophone for "death floor" in spoken Chinese.

is a transborder-co-production with China. Released in 2002 and 2004, both films precede the 2008 implementation of CEPA V, the mainland and Hong Kong Closer Economic Partnership Agreement, which allows Hong Kong's domestic market to include all of Guangdong Province and amounts to official recognition of linguistic and cultural difference within the national self (Pang 2010: 142). Although they are not transborder co-productions, *Going Home* and *Dumplings* nonetheless have pan-Chinese appeal, using bilingualism to interpellate audiences in mainland China, Hong Kong, and overseas.¹¹ For example, pan-Chinese audiences notice visual puns unremarked by either dialogue or subtitling but prominent for viewers who can read written Chinese script: because the words "four" and "death" are homophones in Chinese (the pronunciation of the two characters sound the same), viewers who see "fourth floor" emblazoned outside Aunt Mei's apartment in key scenes are given forewarning that she is an ominous figure dealing in a deathly trade¹² (see Figure 18.10).

Conclusion

Going Home was the Hong Kong contribution to the first omnibus pan-Asian film release, Applause Pictures' *Three*, which also contained episodes from South Korea (*Memories*, dir. Kim Jee-woon, b.o.m. film productions), and Thailand (*The Wheel*, dir. Nonzee Nimibutr, Cinemasia). The second installment in the anthology franchise, *Three...Extremes* offered episodes from Japan (*Box*, dir. Takashi Miike,

Kadokawa Pictures), South Korea (*Cut*, dir. Park Chan-wook, b.o.m. film productions), and Hong Kong (*Dumplings*).

As has often been noted, the number “three” in the franchise title refers not only to the three different short films and directors brought together in the anthology format, but also refers to the franchise’s attempt to multiply its market address threefold. As Peter Chan put it, “The philosophy of *Three* is to make a film that can be popular in three places.” Aware that market proximity (Yeh and Davis 2002: 67) – a sense of familiarity with another nation’s screen texts – varies across markets, the franchise attempts to use a local product’s recognizable setting, director, language, and stars to win over audiences who might otherwise have been hesitant to watch movies from an unfamiliar national cinema (Chow 2002: 5).

The success of the pan-Asian recipe adopted by the *Three* franchise was limited and uneven. As with J-horror, DVD distribution (e.g., Tartan Extreme) rather than theatrical exhibition was the primary mode of regional and global circulation for both *Three* and *Three Extremes* (Lee 2011: 105–110; Wada-Marciano 2009: 26).¹³ Nonetheless, a consideration of the franchise’s theatrical box office performance might prove instructive. Although the *South China Morning Post* reported that *Three* was a box office success in Thailand (Chow 2002: 5), its box-office performance in South Korea was considered a disappointment by b.o.m. film productions. The Hong Kong segment *Going Home* was the best received of the three episodes in South Korea (Lee 2011: 107). Davis and Yeh report that in terms of overall box office performance on the local (Hong Kong), regional (intra-Asian), and global scales, *Three* and *Three...Extremes* lagged well behind *The Eye*, “by far Applause’s most commercially successful film” (Davis and Yeh 2008: 95–96). *Dumplings* and *Going Home*, both re-released in feature-length versions that garnered awards in Hong Kong and Thailand and broad critical acclaim, demonstrate that generic reinvention combined with a hybrid “commercial art film” aesthetic could bring visibility and status to these films and to Applause itself (Davis and Yeh 2008: 94–95). These films’ fascinating weave of culturally-specific allusions, on the one hand, and attempts at pan-Asian appeal, on the other, resulted in limited box office success alongside a warm critical reception for both *Going Home* and *Dumplings*. In closing, I would speculate that this outcome is partly rooted in the dual structure of a cinema of allusion (Carroll 1982: 56).

In its pan-Asian incarnation in *Going Home* and *Dumplings*, the cinema of allusion actualizes a two-tiered system of address: first, genre pictures for regional and global audiences unfamiliar with the films’ references but able to appreciate the films’ reworking of the horror genre’s themes and conventions; and second, an intertextual work for “informed viewers” (Carroll 1982: 52–53) familiar with these culturally specific references and thus able to retrace the expressive reservoir from which both films draw.

In terms of the first mode of audience address – reworking genres in order to address regional and global audiences – generic experimentation can be risky for films that need to close the gap between the (foreign) work and the (local)

audience. Particularly in the case of *Dumplings* and *Going Home*, several observers have remarked that the films neither adhere to horror film conventions nor deliver the generic expectations raised by the labels “Asian horror” or “Asia extreme,” the latter being a loose umbrella category minted by Tartan Asia Extreme’s genre-branding, which distributed *Three* and *Three...Extremes* on DVD (Lee 2011: 106; Johnston 2005).

In terms of the second mode of audience interpellation, *Dumplings* and *Going Home* make heavy demands upon a culturally and historically knowledgeable viewer who can activate reading protocols attuned to the films’ rich allusive texture, their *zhongyi* motif, strong Maoist charge, and bilingualism. Such exegetical pleasures are likely to exert great appeal for serious students of film, which may account for the critical acclaim and scholarly interest these films have enjoyed. To the degree that they might, on hindsight, be recognized as testing out the possibilities of a pan-Asian cinema of allusion, *Dumplings* and *Going Home* exemplify the delicate balancing act such filmmaking requires: to speak broadly to all while speaking obliquely to some, a dynamic of audience inclusion and exclusion that is fascinating in its contradiction.

A political fantasy about audiences is at work in the framing of *Going Home* and *Dumplings*; this fantasy mingles both actual and potential social relations. Pan-Asian cinema is pitched at actual markets, but its production and marketing are driven by imaginary projections of how diverse viewers will really engage or consume these films. The potential mismatch between market projections and actual reception is the wager hazarded by a pan-Asian cinema of allusion.

Notes

- 1 This chapter was completed under the auspices of a Visiting Research Fellowship at the Kyoto University Center for Southeast Asian Studies. An earlier version of this paper was presented at a conference on “Geopolitics and Aesthetics” held at Northwestern University on May 31, 2012. I benefited greatly from the input of several interlocutors while writing this paper: first, my late mother, Felicidad Cua-Lim, who talked to me at length about personal experiences with traditional Chinese medicine. My friend Charmian Uy, who is fluent in Chinese languages (Mandarin and Hokkien) as I am not, helped make legible bilingual allusions and visual puns in both films that I would have missed otherwise. Ackbar Abbas and Caroline Sy Hau gave generous and incisive commentary on earlier drafts. I am grateful for all these exchanges, though accountability for any remaining misprision is mine alone.
- 2 As Emilie Yueh-Yu and Neda Hei-tung Ng point out in their discussion of both films, *Going Home* and *Dumplings* have in common their focus on medical doctors trained in mainland China, whose travels to and from Hong Kong suggest that the border is rapidly dissolving in lived terms: “The heavy traffic between China and Hong Kong implies that the border might only be ‘administrative’ in nature.”

- 3 I owe this vein of thinking to Caroline Hau, a preeminent thinker of the histories of Chineseness in the context of specific discursive iterations of Asian regionalism.
- 4 The term biomedicine underscores the “strong biological, and therefore material and scientific orientation” of modern medicine from the 20th century onwards, but it does so with a certain criticality, drawing attention to the naturalized socio-cultural context of this now established model of medicine, and its relative shortcomings with regards to other therapeutic paradigms. (Bates 2006: 37)
- 5 See Kleinhans (2007) for a discussion of the significance of Shenzhen as a setting in *Dumplings*.
- 6 The *New York Times* reports: “under the new policy, the most significant overhaul of China’s family planning rules in 30 years, married couples in which just one parent is an only child can also have a second baby. The previous rules allowed two children for couples in which both parents are only children. The old policy also made exceptions for China’s officially recognized ethnic minorities and rural couples whose first child was a girl or disabled.” (Levin 2013)
- 7 For Lu Tonglin, Aunt Mei’s collection of kitsch signifies that Chinese tradition, which here encompasses its Communist past, has become “an empty signifier because of its excessive significations.”
- 8 Elaborating on his idea of catachresis, Abbas writes: “The sight of the king’s crooked crown in a performance of *Le Cid* (catachresis), [Walter] Benjamin tells us, gave him the idea for his book on baroque allegory, *Trauerspiel*. Benjamin as you know has a mimetic theory of language. But in a problematic space/time, mimesis can only take the form of allegory; i.e., mimesis is allegorical, allegory is mimetic. Or, ‘distortion’ is the only form of exactitude (Cf. Deleuze on ‘the powers of the false’). This is not to say that there is no exact language, a banal argument. Rather, it is a way of focusing on the conditions that produce these aberrations, a way to be precise about illegibilities. Just as the socialist market economy is neither contradictory nor exact; its blatant wrongness challenges us to be more precise. (For me, it is the notion of a ‘posthumous socialism,’ a ‘vital’ afterlife.)” Ackbar Abbas, Email to the author, July 12, 2012.
- 9 Fruit Chan: “People started to eat embryos a long time ago. Average housewives tended to eat placenta for regaining health after giving birth to a baby. In Chinese tradition it’s a common means of rejuvenation in real life... The plot of *Dumplings* actually connects it with the ultimate pursuit of beauty.” (Chan 2006)
- 10 Key Ray Chong notes that China has a long history of regarding endophagy as a form of filial piety. The practice of filial cannibalism takes on a markedly gendered character in the Sung dynasty (960–1126), when daughters and daughters-in-law sacrificed a piece of their flesh to cure a family member who was ailing or undernourished. By the Yuan dynasty (1206–1368) the practice was so widespread that imperial bans against endophagy were issued, though those who practiced medicinal cannibalism out of filial piety – particularly self-sacrificing young wives – continued to inspire popular esteem. (Chong 1990: 97–99)
- 11 Hong Kong’s Applause Pictures and South Korea’s CJ Entertainment, both identified by Yeh and Davis (2008) as intra-Asian co-production firms, were involved in both *Three* and *Three... Extremes*. A third intra-Asian production company, Japan’s Kadokawa, was involved in *Three... Extremes*. In addition, other companies not mentioned in Yeh and Davis’ list of intra-Asian players were also involved: Thailand’s

- Cinemasia and Korea's b.o.m film productions in *Three*, and b.o.m film productions in *Three Extremes*.
- 12 Profound thanks to my friend Charmian Uy for this and several other insights on *Going Home* and *Dumplings*.
 - 13 Tartan Asia Extreme, based in UK, folded in 2008; since 2008, its DVDs have been distributed in the US and the UK by Palisades-Tartan (who acquired the Tartan Films library), founded by the US-based Palisades Media Group.

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Double Agents, Cameos, and the Poor Man's Orchestra

Music and Place in Chungking Express

Giorgio Biancorosso

The film [Chungking Express] depicted Chungking Mansions misleadingly.
(Mathews 2011: 14)

I cannot imagine anyone in Hong Kong listening to "California Dreamin'" in the early 1990s.

(Historian John Carroll, personal communication)

Flaunting virtuoso camera work, proneness to endless punning, and unabashed exploitation of their leads' star power, Wong Kar-wai's films are deeply indebted to the values and the practices that have gelled in and around the most representative genres of the Hong Kong film industry (Bordwell 2000). At the same time, they represent a signal departure in that they trade in those very genres in a decidedly reflexive mode. As with Godard or Tarantino, an almost excessive love of cinema, and seemingly uncontrollable penchant for borrowing, begat films that are viscerally derivative, yet utterly different from, the mainstream fare feeding it.¹ To the knowing cinephile, Wong Kar-wai's films come across as a kaleidoscope of citations, borrowed materials coalescing into a strangely compelling original surface; conversely, they may be described as a mosaic exhibiting what initially appears to be a novel design yet consisting, upon closer scrutiny, of tiles borrowed from pre-existing representations in now fluid, now jarring combinations.

As an ambassador between present and past, and between local and global cinemas, music has earned pride of place in Wong's melancholy recreations (Biancorosso 2010). Their most distinctive characteristic is the breadth and quality of the musical references, ranging from the strategic recycling of recognizable registers and timbres to the explicit citation of pre-existing materials, which he sometimes "poaches,"

as it were, from other films' soundtracks (Biancorosso 2015). This approach is apparent in all his films and is in keeping with the director's catholic taste, and desire to control the use of music in the final mix.² Notable exceptions are his first feature, *As Tears Go by* (1988), and *Ashes of Time* (1994), which features an original, if deeply allusive, score (subsequently rearranged and augmented for the film's "redux" version). Nowhere to be heard in Wong's films are the title themes by well known Canto-pop singers recurring at predictably climactic points or the "canned" music that pervades so many Hong Kong dramas, romances, and action flicks.

A Musical Cartography?

Chungking Express (1994) warrants a separate, sustained treatment for the complexity of its sonic, as well as visual, imagery, and the significance of the relationship it posits between music and place. Unlike *Fallen Angels* (1995), no mention is made, let alone images shown of, the connective tissues that run between its main locales: the water, tunnels, highways, and transport links of Hong Kong. The Chungking Mansions in Tsim Sha Tsui, the Midnight Express eatery in Lan Kwai Fong, and the areas neighboring the Mid Levels Escalator, on the contrary, are shown in isolation from one another: monads of dramatic space reserved for independent, "water-tight" vignettes. Such neat allocation of space reminds one of set changes in the theater and is only occasionally clouded, in characteristically suggestive asides, by having the protagonists accidentally rub each other's shoulders.³ In one such, and much-cited, instance, Faye (Faye Wong) appears in the same frame as the drug-dealer (Brigitte Lin), the former carrying a large Garfield Cat to be seen much later in Cop 663's (Tony Leung) home. The temporary, and accidental, convergence of paths occasionally signals a tangle; at other times, as is the case here, it doesn't. The two characters will never see each other again. As Jean Ma has pointed out (Ma 2010: 130), the image is potentially significant in that it suggests that the two halves of the films, corresponding to the two cops' mulling over their unrequited loves, are simultaneous and not consecutive.⁴ Its insertion is a subtle argument in the form of editing, the significance of the simultaneity of narratives we thought consecutive being stressed by withholding it from the view of all except the most discerning spectators. The obscuring of the "true" temporal relation between the film's two halves is made possible by the fact that though the two male characters frequent the same places – Midnight Express and, to a lesser extent, the Mid Levels escalator – they occupy them at different times. Midnight Express takes on added significance in that it operates, as Bordwell and Ma have aptly observed, as a "hinge" between the two stories (Bordwell 2000: 282; Ma 2010: 129). But instead of crosscutting between one and the other, the director has strung each segment of Cop 223's (Takeshi Kaneshiro) story into one continuous narrative, subsequently moving on to just as continuous an exposition of Cop 663's. In Godardian fashion,

the reality of what is shown on screen supersedes actual chronology. By reordering events that putatively took place simultaneously, however, the diptych gives eloquent form to how their characters experience them. As befits lonely urban dwellers, the two cops go on about their lives utterly ignorant of one another and, consequently, the parallels in their predicament. Perhaps just as aptly, then, *Midnight Express* may be said to function like a “revolving door” passed through by people sharing the same space yet kept separate by the vagaries of urban life.⁵

There must be a practical rationale, too, behind the successive presentation of the two main plot lines. Wong constructed his films after the golden industry rule of a reel-to-reel scheme (Bordwell 2000: 275 and 283). It is doubtful he shot the two stories simultaneously. In the first half alone, Cop 223 is seen wander between at least two main locations – Chungking Mansions and Lan Kwai Fong – while the drug dealer combines her time spent at the Mansions with frequent visits to a joint run by her employer and lover, also in the Lan Kwai Fong district, as well as a trip to the airport (where the deal goes bust). The two of them, moreover, spend the night together at yet another location: a hotel in Kowloon. Adding another multifaceted plot line, and two new locations, would have simply been too taxing for the spectator. In the first half of the film, and just like the title, the editing links different portions of the urban space rather bluntly by simply juxtaposing images of one to images of another via unceremoniously straight cuts. The blunt, forced association of different locales is foreshadowed in the design of the Chinese title itself, which consists of a collage of the ideograms for “Chungking” (*Chongqing* 重慶) and “Jungle” (*senlin* 森林) by what appear to be two hands.⁶ A cut-in-action taking us from the cop to the drug dealer – or vice versa – signals a temporal relation of simultaneity interpretable as either an instance of parallel montage or cross-cutting: if the latter, one anticipates a cause–effect relationship or convergence; if the former, a thematic association is pondered instead.

In a thought experiment, the two halves of the film might be viewed as a diptych showcasing a unique example of parallel montage executed at an extremely slow speed. Because of the extreme “delay” with which the second episode is introduced, the simultaneity can only be conceptualized *a posteriori* rather than contemplated “in the moment.” Unlike a narrative painting, in cinema the form of the diptych does not allow simultaneous appreciation of its two parts. Also unlike painting, the division consists of a moment in time (as much as a visual break). At what point is the viewer to place the pivotal “cut” that takes us from one story to the other? The film is in this respect unambiguous. It is when Cop 223 and Faye rub shoulders by the deli counter (see Figure 19.1). Here, the image freezes, turning a minor plot incident into a lengthy transition and the quicksilver gazing of Cop 223’s eyes into Faye’s into a sustained moment of contemplation. In a quasi-operatic stretching of chronological time, Cop 223 delivers his last soliloquy: “This is the closest we ever got. Just 00.1 of one centimeter between us. I knew nothing about her. But six hours later she fell in love with another man.” The words echo the one he utters at the very beginning of the film upon nearly crashing into the



Figure 19.1 *Chungking Express* (Wong Ka-wai, 1994).

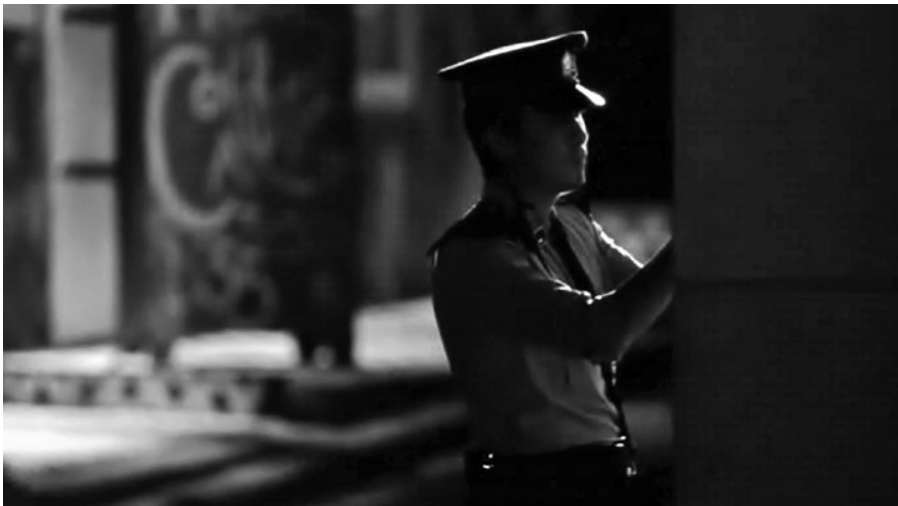


Figure 19.2 *Chungking Express* (Wong Ka-wai, 1994).

drug dealer; here they function as a bookend and hint at a new narrative, and with it a fresh group of characters. Cut to Cop 663 signing off his duty card opposite Midnight Express, captured by a telephoto lens in a multiple-frame shot against the Lan Kwai Fong blur (See Figure 19.2). The warm tones of the image of the district at night, alongside the sight of what promises to be a new protagonist, reinforce the status of this moment of the film as a major narrative caesura. But it is the Mamas and the Papas' "California Dreamin'," blasting from a stereo inside the shop, that propels the viewer into a new zone and marks the space as the site

of a different stage of the film. It is, in this respect, an important editing device as much as an element of the milieu we see onscreen. In the absence of master shots, music in *Chungking Express* often announces the move to a new locale and clarifies – to wit, amplifies – the divisions between the film’s various spaces, and the narratives they witness. As in radio dramas, the soundtrack delineates a cartography of sorts. So a track of Indian Bhangra accompanies the drug dealer’s murder of her pursuers in the Chungking Mansions; Dennis Brown’s “Things in Life” is heard whenever we see the bar and its owner flirting with a South Asian woman; Frankie Chan and Roel Garcia’s nocturnal lounge music permeates the episode between Cop 223 and the drug dealer (also in a bar); and “California Dreamin’,” finally, returns us obsessively to Midnight Express and its counter. But it is a solipsistic, purely subjective geography – geography of affects – which the music elucidates. This is most clear precisely at the point where Midnight Express starts functioning as the set for a new story. For while the locale, in a physical sense, is naturally the same place as the one seen before, at that moment it also takes a new identity in a differently configured network of agents and flow of affects. If only figuratively, “California Dreamin’” takes us from one space to another.

“Circle K” Aesthetics

The song heralds the entrance of Cop 663 onstage, wrapping him in new and colorful sounds, and associating him with a dream of a journey to a sunny, faraway place (the California of the title). The now famous “discant” between two acoustic guitars that opens the song is cued in near the end of the freeze frame of Cop 223 looking at Faye. The first vocal line (“All the leaves are brown/and the sky is grey”) is neatly synchronized to the appearance, in the following shot, of Tony Leung. Shrouded in the red and amber lights of the sloped alley, his figure is already in focus but his identity remains unclear. As he approaches the counter, in a slightly menacing manner, he takes off his hat. A luminous medium-close up of Leung’s clean, finely chiseled face, wearing a benevolent expression, brings the shot to a reassuring end. Already a recognizable matinee idol, Leung receives here proper star treatment, complete with the trappings of an elaborately staged entrance: the striking new iconography, suspense generated by the gradual, finely calibrated unveiling of his identity, and a new soundtrack. The music frames Cop 663’s appearance serendipitously; it is not, strictly speaking, meant for him. It is Faye who is playing it on a stereo inside the shop. The acoustics are the first hint. As Leung approaches the counter, reverberation, a faint echo, and slight yet perceivable distortions of the signal betray the presence of a source positioned in the proximity of the action.⁷ As we cut to Faye we not only see the shop where the music is coming from but also realize, in a classic variant of the standard, triadic point-of-view shot structure, that we had been furtively looking at Cop 663

through her eyes (she feigns being absorbed by her chores when, about to place his order, his gaze finally crosses hers). It is, as per convention, love at first sight. But her "sighting" him comes dressed up – again, serendipitously – in the hopeful strains of "California Dreamin'" which, having been caught in the current of her nascent feeling, will from now on be played *ad nauseam*.

The calculated reappearance of the song every time he stops by is a covert message. Though Cop 663 is initially bound to miss its import, he cannot fail to notice it as Faye constantly plays it at an annoyingly high volume; she is, as it were, hiding her dream in plain sight. Because of the volume, the song also becomes the occasion for comedy as it drowns out Faye and Cop 663's voices as they laboriously try to get past pleasantries and engage in something like a real conversation. But the biggest joke is that Faye, as if the victim of a self-inflicted conditioning experiment, ends up doing what is implied by the lyrics – that is, packing up and going to California. She manages her feat by becoming a stewardess and, in this way, taking the place in Cop 663's heart previously occupied by his former girlfriend (also a stewardess). It is her hyperbolically circuitous, convoluted way of delivering her feelings at his heart's footsteps, even more oblique than her other expression of interest in him: the clandestine trips to clean up, incognito, his apartment.⁸

Faye's mimetic impulse cannot be faulted, for he does fall for her in the end. The insistence on the stewardess theme is not fortuitous for other reasons as well. In secluded Hong Kong, air travel has been a necessity of life, and its imagery has permeated the culture to an extent rarely matched in other parts of the world (Lai and Choi 2013: 8–9). Its ports of call have drawn maps of both circulation and desire and the history of Hong Kong Cinema bears witness to this. "Air hostess" films constitute a small but respectable subgenre in the history of the local film industry. The most famous of them all remains perhaps *Air Hostess* (Evan Yang, 1959), a now "cult" classic featuring Grace Chang (also known as Ge Lan).⁹ In the film the stewardess is not only pictured as a privileged member of society with access to a burgeoning global community; she is also depicted as an agent of change. Frequent flying was a rare, envied opportunity. Among its perks came the ability to bring all manner of gadgets and trendy, hard-to-find artifacts – including music records – from all sorts of exotic locales, including the perceived centers of what was new and fashionable (in the cold war world order, this meant the USA, with Japan a distant second, as well as Britain). This also turned hostesses into trendsetters of sorts, holders of a cultural cachet no longer obtainable nowadays, at a time when new products and trends are launched – via media events – almost simultaneously in every corner of the world.

Andrew Jones (Jones, unpublished) has argued that the association between stewardesses and musical imports in Hong Kong – mambo, rock or, later on, surfing – encapsulated the stewardess' partaking of the global circuit (hence his captivating metaphor, "circuit listening"). Compare this to the, at best dated, charm of "California Dreamin'," in *Chungking Express* (the song was released in 1966). The song spells out Faye's intentions, notwithstanding the emotionless,



Figure 19.3 The California bar...today (photo by the author).

inscrutably mechanical manner in which she parades it; but it is devoid of any cultural capital whatsoever – hence the endearing, even melancholy, appeal it holds for the contemporary viewer. By a significant parallel, Faye’s dream of becoming a stewardess, thirty-some years after the job was most sought after, is at best quaint. True, in the film “the men are grounded, while the women move freely[.]” (Marchetti 2002: 307). But by the 1990s the profession had suffered the proverbial, if the pun may be excused, fall from grace, acting and, especially, modeling having taken over as professional images of globe-trotting success for the young and beautiful.

Yet Faye seems unmoved by her condition of young, disempowered youth chasing an out-of-date dream. Like many characters in Wong’s oeuvre, she is a latter-day, urban *bricoleur*, grabbing sounds, images and slogans that, irrespective of their provenance, serve her immediate purposes. The logic that dictates her choice of profession, and “California Dreamin’,” is purely associational. Midnight Express, the food joint where she works, is nearly opposite to *California*, the iconic bar in Lan Kwai Fong’s California Tower (a building which, though it remains largely unseen, the film has now come to commemorate since it no longer exists; see Figure 19.3). True, the association may be facile, thoughtless even; yet that is precisely its point, for it is consistent with the copycat mentality that seems to dominate the building industry – from planning, to execution and of course

naming – across the city. If developers see it fit to name a whole tower after California, why shouldn't Faye be playing a song that celebrates it? After all, if the expiry date of the stewardess dream was long past, so was that of the building just across: naming it California as late as the early 1990s, when it was erected, was at best to short-sell a dream that no one was really buying to local dwellers and tourists alike.¹⁰ "California Dreamin'," then, underscores Faye's vulnerability to the dreams sold by the environment she is part of. The compulsive nature of her playing the track shows the dream to be stifling, and it will cause her to drift off. But it also bespeaks the focus, bordering on obsessiveness, that is Faye's strength and which, to an extent at least, enables her to be more than just a regurgitator of whatever her surroundings feed her. The song is rather like an exercise she must conduct daily, and the volume at which she plays it indicates the determination and formidable strength of her will. It is self-inflicted muzak on steroids, a "pop mantra," which she uses to instill in herself the resolve to leave. The approach is radically utilitarian, albeit one in keeping with her predicament: going to California; seducing Cop 663; drowning out other people's conversations; and so forth. It is the epitome of solipsistic listening, one that assimilates a pop song to off-the-shelf, globally distributed products purchased to serve one's most immediate needs, like a can of fruit or carton of milk in a "Circle K" store. Yet the affective surplus she is capable of bestowing upon it, reminiscent of Cop 223's attachment to canned pineapple, redeems its status as commodity, turning it into a figure of destiny.

Punned Personas

As seen through Cop 663's eyes the figure of the stewardess is less a reflection of Faye's aspiration toward mobility and middle-class status than a throwback to an older era in which the profession was associated with a certain prestige and even glamour. The stewardesses, in *Chungking Express*, are a means to give expression to the elusiveness of romantic fulfillment; they impart a flavor of unreality to Cop 663's love interests, unreality which the awareness of the counterparts of May and Faye in older films, and the mythology and urban legends surrounding air hostesses in general, will only help to heighten. When, near the end of the film, Cop 663 waits for Faye in *California*, we are made to wonder not just whether she'll come but whether she must exist as effigy or simulacrum for him to feel any longing for her. Dressed in the pastel colored, freshly laundered "civilian" clothes she readied for him before taking off – the image of the hopeful bourgeois boy – he arrives a bit early, orders a beer, and asks for change to play some tunes at the jukebox. But this, we soon learn, is no ordinary date. Faye will not show up. Sipping a drink and smoking in a bar that is the simulacrum of the land of golden opportunities, he plays track after track after track; yet all we hear is Frankie Chin-Roel Garcia's nocturnal lounge music. Playing non-diegetically, the

music had already been used by the director during Cop 223's aborted attempt at seduction, in a seedy, semi-deserted bar, of the blonde-wigged drug dealer. The repetition suggests a metaphorical link between the two stories across nearly an hour of screen time. Had the director crosscut between the film's two main episodes, the two scenes might have turned out to be adjacent, the music a bridge between them.

Along with the close range of the shots, the music obliterates the presence of the other patrons of the bar, insulating Cop 663 from his surroundings. We see here, too, a reprise of the famous technique combining fast motion in the background (where the unknown Lan Kwai Fong dwellers move and gather) with slow in the foreground (where Cop 663 is). Used already once to capture his immediate response to May's departure, this is the image of heartbreak, brilliantly rendered as a dissociation, within the single frame, in the perception of the passing of time.¹¹ As during the flashback of his relationship with May, he comments on Faye's absence in voice-over by mumbling references to plane travel: would the flight be delayed? Had it been cancelled? Not having learned his lesson, Cop 663 seems intent on repeating his fixation on air hostesses and articulating his desire in terms borrowed from an airline brochure. Were it not for Tony Leung, whose star power upends the disappointment of the boy-meets-girl plot, it would be a scene of Fellinian cruelty: the ritualistic betrayal of the "little guy," shown here in all his petit bourgeois delusions, at the hands of the myths of consumer society (of which Faye a.k.a. the Stewardess is the unwitting agent).

The disingenuous strategy of using big stars to play lonely, disempowered characters comes perhaps to a head in Faye, as Faye Wong was at the time of filming already a big, widely recognizable star in the Cantopop firmament. The paper-thin quality of Faye in *Chungking Express* is doubtless also due to the considerable weight given in the film to the real-life counterpart who plays her role. Like Grace Chang/Ge Lan, Faye Wong is both an actress and a singer. A latter-day songstress, a familiar figure in Chinese-language cinemas, she is perhaps the clearest demonstration of just how rooted in tradition Wong Kar-wai's casting method is. Scrutiny of her private life by the media, combined with awareness of her musical career, and familiarity with her beautiful, distinctive voice, has naturally affected the reception of her appearance in this film. The fluidity of personnel across media has been a recurrent and widely accepted fact in the world of Hong Kong showbiz. The aesthetic implications of this state of affairs remain somewhat difficult to capture in a simple formula but are of the essence to a definition of not just Wong Kar-wai's but Hong Kong cinema more broadly (at least as consumed by local audiences). As Brian Hu has noted, the use of known singers "bring[s] a rush of recognition, allowing the audience to enlarge the frame of reference of the scene by relating it to its experiences of the star's image from other media, in particular here, from music video" (Hu 2006: 421–422). Actors may be said to be enacting a state of perpetual suspension between their onscreen character and public (or musical) persona, as if engaged in sustained cameos of themselves: a form of

embodied punning – “Faye” a.k.a. Faye – that resonates with the puns behind the names of buildings (California) and the title of the film.

Faye Wong's musical persona looms especially large in *Chungking Express*. The release of her Cantonese cover of The Cranberries' “Dreams” as part of her ambitious cover CD-project, *Random Thoughts* (胡思亂想), probably led to the selection of “California Dreamin'” as a foil.¹² As if out of respect to their chronology, and the true genealogy of the ‘dreaming’ trope in pop history, The Mamas and the Papas' song appears well before her cover, conveniently “masking” the true trajectory of the process of selection of the film's tracks. Just as important, the text of “Dreams,” especially in its Chinese version, would seem to have inspired the staging of Cop 663's sudden appearance in her life, capturing the significance of that fateful meeting's repercussion in her existence.¹³ Her first appearance in the film, carrying the Garfield Cat for Cop 663, is rather like a fork sorting out with almost surgical precision the two sides of her role: as yet unknown and out of place as “Faye,” she is on the other hand immediately recognizable as Faye Wong. Should her role in the film end there, her appearance would amount to no more than a classic cameo, yet a cleverly devious one at that, for the sight of an immediately recognizable public figure distracts the viewer from precious evidence (the stuffed animal) that the two halves of the film may be simultaneous rather than successive. Two more “cameos” follow: first, the quasi-encounter with Kaneshiro's Cop 223 which marks the midpoint of the film and, finally, following the elaborate entrance shot for him, the counter-shot of her stealing a glance at Tony Leung's Cop 663. By then, Faye the character, as distinct from the singer, has been “inducted” as a major player in the story. The cameo remains in place, nonetheless, as an operative principle as the punning between the recognizable star from the world of showbiz and humble, sentimental character she plays in *Chungking Express* is exploited to the fullest extent. The director adds a twist to it by insisting on a plain appearance in simple, even humble, surroundings. In this way he peels away the aura of the pop celebrity by bringing to light an image of her uncluttered by the trappings of the star system while at the same time reminding us of a dimension known to be part of the “real” Faye Wong, namely her dislike for elaborate, pompous etiquette in her private life (as exemplified by images of her seen traveling with the notoriously cheap, three-colored, nylon bags that are synonymous with Hong Kong immigrants the world over: itself, incidentally, an instance of the construction of an image).¹⁴

The “flickering” image that confronts the viewer contemplating a pop star playing herself playing a fictional character is brought to a high point in the two sequences in which Faye surreptitiously enters Cop 663's apartment. In the first, she cleans up his flat to the strains of – as would be expected – “California Dreamin'.” Just before starting with her “chores,” she is shown inserting a CD into his hi-fi. The seemingly innocent gesture betrays the essentially musical nature of the episode. The beginning of the song is like an instrumental introduction to an operatic aria, jump-starting the new number and creating a set of

expectations as to what will follow (and for how long: the duration of the song). The unconventionally paced montage of Faye at work constitutes her “solo.” The diegetic status of the music having been ritually established through the shot of her operating the CD player, the song then continues as “sco-urce” (part source, part score) or, to cite another neologism used with similar descriptive purposes, “ambi-diegetic” music (Holbrook 2011). Grounded in the physical world of the characters, it nevertheless fills the space of the flat rather implausibly (recall, for a comparison, the acoustically nuanced first presentation of the song when Faye meets Cop 663 for the first time). The montage sequence the music accompanies, and whose length it determines, moreover, is the survey of a process that unfolds along a stretch of time far longer than the song itself. This, too, alters the initial status of the music somewhat in that the suggestion of a coincidence between represented time and time of performance (or reproduction) is an important subsidiary function of diegetic music. Though not quite as stylized as a dance number, the sequence is a reworking – artfully compressed, playful, musically ordered – of a moment in Faye’s life in terms of her hopeful, dreamy state of mind, which the music spells out, California dreaming and all, on her behalf (Binns 2008: 138; Redmond 2008: 45). The suppression of sound marks Cop 663’s flat in this instance as the space of Faye’s daydreaming (Yeh 1999: 126). It is a suppression that is all the more significant when cast against her earlier, and unsuccessful, attempts to drown the sound of her surroundings while working at Midnight Express. There, the music stubbornly clings to its diegetic status as her cousin and other patrons constantly burst the bubble of sound she is weaving around herself (on one occasion, her cousin does so quite abruptly by unceremoniously turning off the CD-player). It is only at the end of her clandestine visit that the status of the music as diegetic artifact, and object of exchange, is reinforced. Having finished her job, she first erases a message by May suggesting a hook-up, and then purposefully leaves the CD with the Mamas and the Papas’ song inside Cop 663’s hi-fi: a dormant message for him to unwittingly decode at the unknowing tip of a finger. The second extended sequence of Faye in Cop 663’s flat shows “Stage two” of her makeover of his living quarters. This, too, in compliance to an intertextual rule, comes in the form of a scrambled collection of shots accompanied by a long stretch of music. Wong’s dubious reputation of shooting sequences as if they were MTV videos derives partly from these sequences (Bordwell 2000: 279; Ashby 2013). Only this time the source is Hong Kong’s contemporaneous media-scape, and Faye Wong’s actual release of the cover of “Dreams” in particular. Featuring her in the soundtrack makes palpable the gulf between the unassuming stewardess wannabe Faye Wong impersonates and the pop star Faye Wong actually is. The insertion of a music video-like short into a narrative film is a displacement that encourages, on the part of the knowing spectator, an interactive relationship with the filmic presentation reminiscent of a “KTV” more than “MTV” – let alone film – aesthetic (Kassabian 2001: 138–139; Hu 2006: 422).

Memory as Wish Fulfillment

In both sequences, the music accompanies a creative effort at reshaping an environment. This makes the question of its status within the diegesis moot. Whether cleaning, rearranging, or furnishing it with new apparel items and accessories, such as new linen for his bed or the proverbial stuffed animal, Faye transforms the flat in something like the way a set designer would. In one, significant, instance, she plays actress / model and dresses herself up like May. Faye successfully molds a piece of physical reality to fit her fantasy of how Cop 663 should lead his life – forget May, eat healthier foods, sleep more – and what her own role in his life should be like. The music partakes of the construction of this fantasy, and conveys something of the momentary “high” during which she indulges in it. Yet this is a fantasy that takes concrete form, and leaves actual traces in, the apartment that Cop 663 eventually returns to after his daily shifts. At no point do we find ourselves questioning that she is actually, albeit surreptitiously, there, cleaning and moving things around.¹⁵ Endowed with the privilege of a voice-over, the two male protagonists reminisce rather than indulging in daydreams: “a voice after the trauma in the moment of retelling” (Cheung 2011: 23). And yet, despite their poise, it is in their flashbacks that the association of music to a creative impulse reaches its most radical manifestation, blurring the boundary between objective and subjective realities and calling the status of what transpires onscreen into question. When Wong Kar-wai's characters remember, they do so in a style that bears an unmistakable resemblance to that of the filmmaker himself. It is as much a case of the director embracing alternative identities, and giving expression to other sensibilities, as one of solipsistically subsuming a variety of types and personalities under his own creative persona (Biancorosso 2013). An area of ambiguity emerges between “doctored” flashbacks on the one hand, and “objective” sequences meant to report on the past, on the other. While this may be confusing, it does offer a compelling cinematic representation of the view of memory as a productive – as opposed to *re*productive – effort. This effort is bent to fulfill a basic human need: that of remembering to mend one's past.

In the famous sequence in which Cop 663 recounts the high point of his relationship with May, flying provides a pool of verbal and visual metaphors to describe the ebbs and flows of their sexual entanglement. The voice-over may give the flow of images the semblance of the stamp of narrative authority, anchoring them in actual, if long past, deeds; yet the verbal gimmickry in which it engages, along with the carefully calibrated musical accompaniment – “What a Difference a Day Makes,” as sung by Dinah Washington, whose sinuous string introduction is synchronized to a long shot of a plane taking off – should warn us that this is no instance of spontaneous, involuntary memory delivering us the facts “as they actually happened.” The whole episode is structured like a musical number and hovers between reminiscence and delusion (or wish-fulfillment). For its entire duration,

the sequence withholds the relationship's true, and unhappy, outcome. Only the voiceover's ending lines provides a reawakening of sorts: "I thought we'd stay together for the long haul/flying like a jumbo jet on a full tank/but we changed course." The song, not coincidentally, stops here, and location sounds resurface to the foreground of the mix. The sonic cut marks the moment of recognition, his coming to terms – during the act of reminiscing – with the reality of what has happened. In *In the Mood for Love* (2000), the melancholy reverie inspired by the radio broadcast of "Hua Yang De Nian Hua" is abruptly interrupted by the deliberately intrusive sounds of a ringing telephone (and a cut to a different scene). In *Chungking Express*, by contrast, not only is there no sonic intrusion to cut the sequence short but also, following the song's "natural" end, the images of the flashback continue, as if by inertia. We see Cop 663 and May wave each other goodbye lovingly through the narrow openings of the flat window and the escalator rails, respectively; yet the appearance of ambient sounds, or the disappearance of the song – which comes to the same thing – tell us that the fantasy is over. As we see May's legs get off the escalator, and exit the frame of Doyle's characteristically tilted shot, we are left with a blurry background till a cut takes us to Faye cleaning the floor at Midnight Express. At this point, we know we are supposed to understand May's greeting as a definitive farewell.

Intriguingly – and misleadingly – enough, *Chungking Express* begins in the manner of an action film as told in the third person. The pre-title sequence is a parallel montage sequence of Cop 223 chasing a wanted man simultaneously with the blonde-wigged dealer rushing through the arrangement of a deal – both in or near the Chungking Mansions in Tsim Sha Tsui. When, after the title, the two main characters accidentally run into each other – 0.01 cm of one another, to be precise, in Kaneshiro's now celebrated voiceover formulation – we realize that we are seeing events as recounted retrospectively from a point in the future, and from the perspective of the cop. The corollary to this is that, contrary to our initial impression, the pre- and post-title sequences are to be reinterpreted as an instance of crosscutting rather than parallel montage.¹⁶ On the question of whether two simultaneous actions presented onscreen are mutually implicating sides of the same event – as in a classic chase – hinges the difference between crosscutting and parallel montage. In the latter, the director cuts back and forth between two distinct, separate events to draw out an analogy or instructive contrast between them (whether they occur simultaneously or not). Speaking from the future or, put another way, in the present of the film viewing experience, Cop 223's voice over also tells us that crosscutting – that is, the teleological orientation of the sequence toward that fateful brushing off one another in the cauldron of the Chungking Mansions – is an artifact of retrospection. The converging of the physical and existential trajectories of two characters who till that point were merely associated by the fact of sharing the same space at the same time, albeit in the contrasting roles of criminal and police enforcer, such converging is made explicit – it is *fated* – by the voice over. After all, every randomly chosen pair of actions is potentially

material for a crosscutting sequence, provided a plotline makes the linkages explicit. Kaneshiro's voiceover chronicles that process of emplotment. The relationship between his chase and the proceedings of the drug deal is initially ambiguous – is it cross-cutting or parallel montage? – because they are segments of a film of his own life Cop 223 is making before our very eyes. Or is Cop 223 merely remembering, instead? The question is, again, moot. When memories run past his mind's eye, they do so with the look and sound of movies. Recalling is not cinematic for the fact that its products are delivered to us, by some third party, in the form of a film sequence; its cinematic nature is one with the act of remembering. Short of falsifying the outcome of the events, especially those that left a scar, Cop 223 recreates them in a form that redeems and soothes him. Which explains why upon stumbling upon a drug dealer – the ideal target for his searches and a possible stepping stone for a promotion – he egregiously glosses over his gross act of incompetence and goes on to inform the viewer instead that “57 hours later [he would] fall in love with this woman.”

The Poor Man's Orchestra

That the title sequence is a fleshing-out of a cinematic fantasy, and not some unmediated representation of a past event, is made clear by the plethora of references embedded therein. To begin with a chase already in progress is itself a classic trope, an effective means to plunge the spectator into the heart of the film by way of other films.¹⁷ The casting, too, is significant. Takeshiro's tall, slender-yet-muscular figure and generically handsome features have the uncanny ability to remind one, at the merest tilt of the camera, of not one but many past glories of Japanese cinema – ranging from the young Mifune through Seijun Suzuki's unwitting heroes all the way to more recent matinee idols. Lin herself, of course, sports a much-noted Marilyn Monroe wig, Lolita shades, and, in a wonderfully cross-genderish gesture, and oblique gesturing toward martial arts cinema, Humphrey Bogart raincoat.¹⁸ As an attempt to conceal her identity, this congeries of costumes is, frankly, improbable; they are, in fact, the conspicuously unconcealed evidence of the intent to reference former starlets and movie characters. The blonde wig does not merely give away an intertextual link. Its very preposterousness and cheap appearance convey the gulf separating original from copy even in the realm of images (Monroe's blonde hair was itself a quintessential image department creation, if ever there was one). Her outfit betrays a certain rush; it's as if she had walked into a film costume store off Nathan Road and put together a disguise at the last minute. That she might have, in fact, mistaken a movie-themed costume shop for a standard clothing store perfectly captures the confusion between movies and the real world. But there is a poignant, bittersweet dimension to this piece of clownery. The distance between knowingness and naïveté is, for these

characters, infinitesimal. Their daily imaginings and routines are fed by the detritus of media-hyped artifacts – clothes, fast food, songs – reaching them through channels they can hardly control: a sign of helplessness as much as declaration of mastery of their milieu.

From beginning to end, the title sequence is underpinned by Galasso's "mock-baroque" music.¹⁹ A pastiche timidly redolent of Wendy Carlos' work for Kubrick, and distant echoes of Emerson Lake & Palmer, the cue is written on and for the synthesizer. It is built upon a dynamic minor-mode ostinato that strengthens the impression of having stumbled upon the action *in medias res*, opening steadfastly with two statements of a standard harmonic progression, voiced like a Vivaldi orchestral refrain: treble against a pedal bass in a quick call and response pattern. Moving steadily in three, this musical nucleus provides much of the sequence's kinetic impetus. The top part sketches something like the skeleton of a melody. To this Galasso soon adds a flourish in the alto register which continues, marching on of its own, as an inner part, till the end of the cue. As the drug dealer enters a seedy establishment bathed in a ghastly red light, a new part – in the upper soprano register – begins to draw a solo in an ostentatiously bluesy manner. The crossover of different idioms is tempered by the fact that the solo moves within the rigid bounds of the meter and harmonic rhythm established by the ostinato as well as the uniform palette of timbres of the synthesizer. Ambient sounds are faded out as the solo comes into its own, preparing for the climax of the pre-title sequence: the title card. As the collage appears on the screen in bold strokes, the solo swells above all the other elements of the mix, acquiring in the process a certain pathos. "Pillow shots" of the city rooftops begin the second half of the title sequence, and lead to a chase involving Cop 223. A thunderstorm is under way in the skies of Hong Kong, and thunders figure prominently in the mix. It is at this point that Cop 223's voice is heard. Images of the chase are supported by the same music throughout. The music partakes of the construction of the chaotic, somewhat threatening but ultimately compelling microcosm, replete with startling juxtapositions, of the Chungking Mansions. As this is, in classic Bond tradition, a chase about which we as yet know precious little, we soon find ourselves in the position of having to weave the thread of the narrative ourselves, piecing together vital information as to whom is chasing whom, along the way. The repetitive – indeed, soon predictable – pattern of the music confers unity to the rather fragmented succession of images. Its reassuringly consistent strains, for all the ominous minor-mode inflections, drives home the point that it is one and the same locale that we are looking at and that the initially confusing array of images will in some way come together into a coherent picture. When, in the heat of the race to catch a wanted man, he rubs shoulders with the drug dealer, Cop 223 announces laconically that he will fall in love with her in 57 hours. It was her, not the criminal, that the elaborate chase was all about.²⁰

The iconography and editing betray the influence of comics: think of the now-famous use of strip-printed images, the hyperbolic turns and twists involving the

chaser and the chased, and the jolting cuts from one climactic moment of the action to the other. Instead of following the action step by step, we are being shown a curtailed sequence, composed of evocative, if somewhat elusive, images of it. The absence of a master shot is in keeping with the fact that Cop 223 is running to himself a private film of his own past: like the local audience to which the film is addressed, he is familiar with the site as he revisits what has happened. The sound effects are, too, cleverly modeled after comics. Instead of an orchestrated mix, punctuated by the occasional climax, we hear discrete sonic events: a crash, a sibilant, screeching or thumping sound, a siren (and so forth). Sifting through the music and a paper-thin, almost perfunctory, background texture, these sounds strike us at somewhat interval regulars like a cinematic translation of the sound effects – “Bang!,” “Slam!,” “Zap!” – one sees in comic books.

There is nothing cartoonish, let alone comic book-like, about the editing of the music. Ostinatos are common in music for action scenes (where they are often reinforced by percussion). The martial elements, key, and kinetic drive initially mark Galasso's music as an instance of “mood music,” that is, as per Jerrold Levinson's definition, as a cue to the correct interpretation of what we see: this is a dangerous situation, and the fate of its protagonists is at stake (Levinson 1996: 257–258). In standard action cues, the recognition of affect depends not only on such features as key and tempo but also sonority and texture; action music often veers toward a zone where music and sound effects overlap. This is not achievable here, as the textures are clearly readable and the part writing, foreshadowing perhaps the love interest that is the true destination of the sequence – and subject of the film – too delicate. The synthesizer, moreover, occupies its own, discrete zone of the mix, utterly separate from the sound effects. The score, in one word, exhibits a disengaged quality: Michael Nyman more than Hans Zimmer. The mechanical, proto-minimalist pattern heightens this impression, repetition precluding the possibility of fine-tuned synch points (lest one cut the images to the music, option which the director did not find workable here). Loosely synchronized to the particular incidents of the action, its tempo neither consistent nor in striking contrast to the blur of the onscreen antics, Galasso's score moves at its own pace and of its own accord – as befits a retrospective, summative soundtrack.

As so often in Hong Kong, the choice of a synthesizer in lieu of flesh and blood players was motivated by economic considerations. The film was, after all, made to a famously tight timeline, and even tighter budget. But the director and his team seem to have made virtue out of necessity. Like the wig, toy weapons, and minimal sets, the synthesizer score redeems its limitations by refusing to disavow its middlebrow quality as it engages in imitation of learned musical registers (the high baroque) and impassioned, highly expressive ones (the solo). Gesturing like a serious, self-important soundtrack, one complete with a strings section and highly paid professional musicians, is the hallmark of musical pastiche, a phantom score conjured for a film running in Cop 223's mind, and to which we are privy, like unwitting soulmates.



Figure 19.4 Brigitte Lin in the *Chungking Mansions* (*Chungking Express*, Wong Ka-wai, 1994).

If the synthesizer is shorthand for the orchestra, the *Chungking Mansions* are the poor man's equivalent of the exotic locales of a big-budget, Hollywood action saga. In place of an Indian bazaar or an undisclosed location in the Amazon, we get to experience the thrill of a foreign, distant country, populated by unknown and, under a false impression, “threatening” people right at home, a mere crossing from the MTR train stop in Tsim Sha Tsui (and a ferry ride away from Central).²¹ Wong is quoted several times saying that the *Chungking Mansions* are a “microcosm.” And a microcosm the building surely is, with shops and restaurants parading merchandise from all over the world and small hotels and bed & breakfast establishments branding themselves after the most diverse, and sometimes extravagant, geographical locations. It is in this delusional place that, at the sound of a tape of Bhangra, we see the wigged drug dealer relish her fantasy of being the star of the murderous plot brewing in her mind (see Figure 19.4). It is the most memorable and symptomatic audiovisual pun of the entire film, its beauty contingent on our seizing upon a concurrent diegetic sound – the music – as it were the component of a complex, and entirely fantastic, self-portrait.

Epilogue

Anthropologists, like historians, do well to expect from films a modicum of accuracy in the depiction of the social and historical circumstances that underpin their narratives. This is not for the sake of documentation. It isn't just that fictional worlds present large areas of overlap with real ones as a matter of course; it is also that the impact of movies depends in no small measure on their being anchored in circumstances we know and care about deeply outside the theater as well. Insofar as the appeal of a film like *Chungking Express* is contingent on our belief that the locales it uses as backdrops to the action are faithfully rendered, a criticism such as the one voiced in the epigraphs to this chapter is a useful corrective. After all, we

don't want our enjoyment to result from a confusion between myth and reality (nor do we want filmmakers to bank on our ignorance). Independent of the degree of resemblance to the real thing they might exhibit, it is the play of images off other images that gives them their peculiar, quasi-talismanic – and, to a Platonist, subversive – substitutive power. Weighing images against one another lends them a capacity to represent a place that the comparison to the real thing would instantaneously shatter. That is why seeing in person a locale that has only been experienced as part of a film can turn out to be a searing disappointment or eye-opening surprise, jolting one into reconsidering one's gullibility.²² Films, however, trade in world-creation as much as world-reflection. After the release – and success – of *Chungking Express*, “California Dreamin'” enjoyed a brief revival in Hong Kong clubs and radio stations, its status as a purely fictional device ironically vindicated by having become part of the actual cityscape.

Short of being entirely fantastic recreations of unknown worlds, celluloid dreams rely on a “fund” of images and sounds drawn from our waking reality the experience of which, in turn, they have the power to fundamentally alter. They engage in a dialogue with images of a lived space in such a way as to inflect or change, sometimes irreversibly, our perception of what is there prior to its being captured on camera. One thinks of the Fontana di Trevi, Rome before and after *La dolce vita* (Federico Fellini, 1960), for instance. The reference to Fellini is not coincidental. Auteurism injects a decidedly personal dimension – or agency – into the intricate relationship between cities and their onscreen mutants. The fact that one can talk of Fellini's Roma, Scorsese's New York or, for that matter, Wong Kar-wai's Hong Kong, indicates that their films' images inform our (re) encounter with the cities where their narratives are set, lending to them a “borrowed” light, spinning a detail into the foreground or obscuring our vision of them. The feedback loop may turn out to be numbing as much as productive, encouraging stereotypical, pre-digested encounters with new and old sites alike.²³ In this way, to borrow David Clarke's striking expression, Hong Kong may be said to be haunted by audiovisual representations of it (Clarke 2011).

Notes

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1 On Wong's cinephilia, see Teo 2005; on his indebtedness to his mentor Patrick Tam, relevant whenever the subject of Godard and citation is raised, see Lam 2011.

- 2 On Wong's interest in music, and his working relationship with veteran composer Frankie Chan Fan-kei, see Lan 2002 and Law 2008. Law 2004 provides an overview of Wong's musical selections and *modus operandi*.
- 3 This method of constructing stories has one important precedent in Rivette's *Out 1: Noli Me Tangere* (1971). While it is unlikely that he saw the original, twelve-hour version, Wong may have been aware of its 1974, shortened one (retitled for the occasion *Out 1: Spectre*).
- 4 Strictly speaking, the moment in time captured by this famous shot need not be anterior to the end of the first episode; we may be seeing the Brigitte Lin character returning – proverbially – to the scene of the crime. If so, the shot would have to be considered an instance of prolepsis. Another factor that makes one less sanguine about the “simultaneity” thesis is that when Cop 223 runs into Faye and we hear the voice-over say that she would soon fall in love with Cop 663, the implication is that his own story has come to an end. Be that as it may, Ma's suggestion holds precisely because of the speed at which these images pass by, and their unexpected occurrence. It is difficult to assess their relationship to a clear before and after. The image of Cop 663's ex-girlfriend May (Valerie Chow) waiting for a taxi at the airport, also placed in the “wrong” half of the film, is another oblique suggestion of cross-cutting between the two major portions of the film; only in this case the implications are not as momentous, since not only is Valerie Chow less instantly recognizable than Faye Wong but she is seen alone, thus leaving the temporal relation of this shot to the ones surrounding it entirely open.
- 5 For the peculiar mix of proximity and distance that characterizes life in urban spaces, and the mental habitus it engenders, see Gan 2003 and Lindner 2011.
- 6 I owe this observation to Dr. Wang Pao-Hsiang, Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, National Taiwan University.
- 7 The 2008 release of the DVD of the film (Criterion), features a soundtrack remastered by Taiwanese sound designer and editor Tu Du-che. There, the diegetic tracks – most prominently the first appearance of “California Dreamin'” – appear at a lower volume and exhibit a greater degree of reverberation. This eliminates the brashness of the original and imparts a greater sense of the physical space inhabited by the characters. Whether one prefers the new to the original version, it is undeniable that upon revisiting his older films Wong Kar-wai seems intent on repackaging them with a greater degree of polish, as is also indicated by Tu's work on the re-release of the Kino DVD of *Fallen Angels* (2009), as well as the rewriting of the whole soundtrack for *Ashes of Time Redux* (2008).
- 8 Bordwell calls flight the film's “master metaphor.” (2000: 286)
- 9 A necessarily brief list of “air hostess” films would have to at least include also *The Charming Girl* (1967), *Lovely Husbands* (1969), *The Adventurous Air Stewardess* (1974) and, post-*Chungking Express*, *The Stewardess* (2002).
- 10 In response to the developers' underestimation of their patrons' wit, Hong Kong has seen the emergence of a uniquely local form of ironic distance from the city's seemingly thoughtless celebration of out-of-date objects of desire. This finds expression, for instance, in the winking embrace of all manner of foreign hits of yesteryear in the clubs of Lan Kwai Fong and Tsim Sha Tsui, embrace that differs markedly from the deliberate, expertise-driven, and campy cultivation of music of the 1970s and 1980s in American clubbing culture, or the growth of period-specific radios on the internet.

- 11 Jean Ma describes its first occurrence, after the breakup with May, as "an oasis of contemplation amid a blur of bodies" (2010: 124).
- 12 Wong, Faye (王菲) (1994), *Random Thoughts* (胡思亂想), Hong Kong: Cinepoly Records, Compact Disc.
- 13 The Chinese translation is more impressionistic and, in the first stanza, stresses the significance of the accidental nature and suddenness of the appearance of the "dreamed" one.
- 14 Critics have also noted the similarity between Faye's appearance and demeanor, and that of Jean Seberg's Patricia in Godard's *Breathless* (1959).
- 15 Baffled, Cop 663 registers slight changes in his surroundings without being able to make out what they mean or might point to. Ironically, proof of the reality of her interventions is that the house takes for his legitimate occupant a somewhat surreal character.
- 16 The characteristic suspense one experiences during a cross-cutting sequence does not apply here, since we do not know, except at the end, that the two plot lines will converge.
- 17 Possible precedents include the chase on foot on dangerous ground that opens *Vertigo* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1958), one on a car such as the opening sequence of the cult film *Thunder Road* (Arthur Ripley, 1958), or a virtuosic multi-transport extravaganza of the kind one sees at the beginning of many James Bond films (and their progeny).
- 18 At the time of filming *Chungking Express*, Wong Kar-wai was still completing *Ashes of Time*, in which Lin plays a cross-dressing character.
- 19 The track was written by Galasso independent of the film. A live version, recorded live in 1992, can be heard on the release *Utopia Americana: Compilation of American Music* (All Music, 2000, Compact Disc).
- 20 The trajectory of the title sequence, from action-filled gangster to ruminating romance film, allegorizes that of the production of the film (Wong obtained financing for the film by pledging it would be an action film).
- 21 On racial prejudice in Hong Kong, particularly toward South Asians and Middle Easterners, see Mathews 2011: 99-100.
- 22 It took this writer years to come to terms with what certain parts of the United States look like when visited in person (as opposed to the way in which Hollywood films depict them). I am sure the experience is a common one.
- 23 All this trading of images has not escaped the eye of the tourism, and even real estate, industries. References to film, as well as image of locations and stars, are routinely used to market Hong Kong as a destination (Pang 2007).

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Documenting Sentiments in Video Diaries around 1997

Archeology of Forgotten Screen Practices

Linda Chiu-han Lai

Overview

This chapter discusses five video-diaries about the intense moments of the handover of Hong Kong in 1997 and what happened in the everyday domain in the months immediately before and after. It begins with a historiographic research question: is it possible to write the history of a monumental moment for Hong Kong using intense sentiments and private thoughts of individuals outside the political arena, and what is the rationale to do so? This chapter is also one of several instances in which I argue for a more wholesome view of Hong Kong moving-image practices – one that breaks away from the binary divide of mainstream versus independent cinema – to recover works of rich and varied screen practices “erased” from the historical knowledge of local culture simply because they are only available outside commercial movie houses. What has been left out and where else to look? These two strands of my historiographic quest converge in one objective: a revisit of the use of moving-image texts to map out their multilevel relations to personal, social, cultural, and institutional politics. Drawing from phenomenological thinking, I turn familiar narrative analysis into the study of “thought paths” and “event-structure.” I suggest, too, that these texts and the background occasions leading to their publishing point to other possible modes of activism than street-wide demonstrations.

Three observable factors have intensified the urgency of this project: first, the growing availability of image-making tools; second, the growing number

of young screenmakers emerging from the many years of effort from the Hong Kong Independent Film/Video Awards (IFVA; founded 1995; renamed in 2012 as The IFVA Awards – Incubator for Film & Visual Media Art in Asia) administered by the Hong Kong Arts Centre (HKAC), and the more recent Fresh Wave Short Film Competition (2005–) administered by the Hong Kong Arts Development Council (HKADC); and third, the increase in academic programs that prepare young filmmakers / videomakers and expanded-screen artists. The bulk variety of screen practices outside the mainstream, I argue, is essential to a deeper understanding of Hong Kong's film and visual culture as well as any prescriptive–diagnostic projection of the future of our image and audience culture.

I shall frame the video diaries in question not so much as a manifestation of the democratization of image-making tools, but as an expression of cinematic experiments via the diary film (video). In the US, the “diary film,” or autobiography-driven film/video essay, was one of the many important innovations in the history of avant-garde cinema in the 1960s to 1970s, epitomized by the works of Stan Brakhage and Jonas Mekas. In Hong Kong, I discover that the diary film, or personal documentary, is the key to the understanding of experimentation, which is the focus of this essay. Diary films/videos as published works did not emerge as a noticeable species until 1994–1995 with the emergence of the first IFVA led by activist videomaker Jimmy Choi, where these works were often assigned the place of “experimental cinema” in the larger scheme of local cultural production. At the very moment of their emergence, they were heavily charged with political incentives in “writing” alternative histories of Hong Kong, a feature that remains obvious in recent works such as Lo Yin-shan's *Driving Lantau: Whisper of an Island* (2011), Anson Mak's *One-way Street on a Turntable* (2007), and various auto-ethnographic works by Linda Lai (2005–) (Choi 2011). The diary film remains the hotbed of experimental thinking, worthy of a place in local film history and local history in general.

How do we talk about 1997? History is often about past events of political significance with causal relations extended over a period of time. Can we not talk about 1997 as a sustained moment as it is experienced by ordinary people? Can sentiments form stories of the past? Can sentiments be treated historically as intelligible accounts? To a historian, what kind of “documents” are screen texts, especially those made for the articulation of the makers' subjectivities without market concern? How do personal video dairies shed light on 1997? In this chapter, I demonstrate how sentiments articulated in structured personal video diaries can be understood as narrative forms for examination.

I shall discuss not only lending a voice to private sentiments, but the employment of necessary “writing” tactics – the embodiment of everyday sensibilities suppressed by the overtly monumental sweep of Hong Kong's

return to its motherland. With two specific clusters of examples, I argue that a more subdued form of cultural activism was very much alive in video diaries. Such activist acts lie not only in the articulation of personal sentiments in the individual works, but also in the highly purposeful programming/curatorial design and modes of exhibition that framed them.

The discursive strategy of this essay specifically argues that the history of everyday life (HOEL)¹ is a productive theoretical trope to resolve the place of cinema in the life world in general. HOEL invites us to look at the everyday through concrete practices, including poetics and the use of artistic evidence. Cinema is not only assisting historical understanding but is, in fact, a unique form of (experimental) historiography, which is why a statement of a revised paradigm is necessary. My research process, too, brings back the phenomenological film theory's contribution to the understanding of the concerned works. While acknowledging the contribution of contemporary film theories and Cultural Studies to symptomatic reading, which highlights the ideational aspects of social cultural process and subsequently the complexity of local commercial cinema within the global machinery of cultural transaction, the users of these theories have not sufficiently attended to everyday creativity. The latter demands the understanding of individual subject's agency at the performative level, and in this research, of artistic articulation. At the intersection of image theories and phenomenological description, I turn an individual's screen practice into strategic insertion into a contingent historical moment.

In my research, I have initially isolated two groups of works. The first group – Group 1 – is part of HKAC's "New Life Movement" 新生活運動 (1997), a program that addressed the possible "new life" Hong Kong may have had after the July 1 handover of sovereignty to China. The program included a performing arts session to explore the Southern Tunes 再唱南音, a Cantonese regional form of songs; an exhibition titled "Sentimental Education" 感性教育; and a "Public Education Art Project" 公眾教育藝術計畫. The film/video program, a two-part series titled "Hong Kong in Transition" 香港過渡期之幹卿底事 comprised video works by trained artists curated by HKAC's programmer Jimmy Choi. The second group of video works – Group 2 – was commissioned by well-known veteran and former RTHK producer Stella Sze (Sze Kit-ling), and Hong Kong-based Japanese independent media producer Hani Mio. It formed a special program series in the 22nd Hong Kong International Film Festival (HKIFF) in 1998, the first after Hong Kong's handover. The invited artists, ten of them in total, were all non-filmmakers, but nonetheless known personalities with a critical edge in the local cultural arena.

For the sake of documentation, and to facilitate future research, I have compiled a list of works from Group 1, highlighting those of a diary and autobiographic nature (Table 20.1), and works from Group 2 (Table 20.2), to highlight the "expressive tools" and intellectual resources of each artist.

Table 20.1 Group 1 – Works from HKAC’s “Hong Kong in Transition” or IFVA 1998

<i>Work title</i>	<i>Author</i>	<i>Content</i>	<i>Relation to “Diary film”</i>	<i>Program</i>
<i>These Shoes Weren’t Made For Walking</i> 纏程漫履	Paul Lee	1995 / Family stories, covering the artist himself, mother, paternal grandmother and his sister	Biography	“Hong Kong in Transition”
<i>Alice in Hong Kong</i> 愛麗絲夢遊香港	Ernest Fung (Fung Wai)	1997, 5 minutes 21 seconds / A walk through the city of Hong Kong from Alice’s POV, asking whether Hong Kong will remain unchanged in 50 years	Video essay	
<i>The Invisible City (Wall)</i> 看不見的城牆	Rita Hui (Hui Nga-shu)	1997, 11 minutes 30 seconds / Two male voices in dialogue, one in Cantonese, one in Putonghua, on the city wall, on remembering and forgetting	Video essay	“Hong Kong in Transition” and IFVA 1998
<i>Little Fukien</i> 小福建	Cheung Chit-cheung	1997, Work in progress, Hi-8, 10 minutes, produced by Video Power / A trip to visit the Fujianese residents in North Point and its past	Autobiographical	“Hong Kong in Transition”
<i>After All These Years</i> 唱歌,做戲,幹啥?	Collective Production	1997, 16 mm, 90 minutes / 12 years (1985–1997) of Blackbird and the People’s Theatre’s pursuit in cultural activism; a document of their activities, with interviews	Group diary	
<i>Old Earth</i> 老土	Jo Law	1995, 7 minutes 22 seconds, SVHS / a work in three sessions - taking up an autobiographic assignment to cover family members and questions of citizenship	Video essay; Biography	
<i>Amidst the Tide</i> 人似浪花	Yuen Fun, Lee Man-kin	Produced by Video Power, 1997, 15 minutes, Hi-8 / Diary of a group of residents in Fu Tei Chung Tsuen attempting to survive the government’s redevelopment plans on the land where they had their home	Activist diary	
<i>Getting Personal</i> 超越黃磬	May Fung	1997, 45 minutes, DV, made with the assistance of Chan Tin-shing / Hong Kong and personal histories revealed through video artist’s creative process and her subject, a painter	Video essay	

(continued)

Table 20.1 (Continued)

Work title	Author	Content	Relation to "Diary film"	Program
<i>Celebration in the Time of Bitter Songs 97</i> 節慶九七之勁歌甘曲	Anson Mak	1997, 60 minutes / Interplay of music and image, family versus country, and the artist's moving house several times in 1997	Diary film	
<i>Diasporama: Dead Air</i> 另起爐灶之耳仔痛	Yau Ching	1997, 87 minutes / The artist confronts notions of nationhood, identity, and postcolonialism by upholding differences through a series of interviews and the use of her image – to counteract the homogenous view of "return to China" circulated in mainstream discourses	Film essay	"Hong Kong in Transition" and IFVA 1998
<i>I am 17</i> 年我十七歲	Fan Yuk-man	A simple record of images of the filmmaker and those around him in 1997	Diary film	"Hong Kong in Transition" and IFVA 1998
<i>Kong-O-Ma-Tau</i> 港澳碼頭	Yank Wong	Shot on the eve of Macau's reunification with China	Diary film	
<i>Apple of Sodom</i>	Chu Hung-kwan	5 minutes, VHS / A dance video, a dark and melancholic computer anime about a contemporary young person's contemplation, set to the music of Marilyn Manson		
<i>In March</i>	Reeve Tang, Sidney Kwok	A Hong Kong teenager, in love with a girl from Shanghai, anticipates a new Hong Kong–China relationship but concludes with greater uncertainty		
<i>Red, Black and White</i>	George Cheng	16 mm / A visual allegory of a man rising to dance in his sleep		
<i>Hong Kong Guy</i> 香港仔	Lo Hoi-ying	60 minutes / The tale of a bored young person returning from an overseas trip to find his home occupied and his parents and friends missing, which provokes another journey of his, this time to China, to look for his disappeared folks		

Table 20.2 Group 2 – Works from “Digital Biography of Hong Kong 1997,” Programs I & II, 22nd HKIFF^a

<i>Work title</i>	<i>Author / The expressive tools and intellectual resources they owned</i>	<i>Duration / year</i>	<i>Synopsis / Coverage</i>	<i>Program</i>
<i>The Daily Mood of Final Certainty or The House of August</i> 最後確認的每日心情 / 八月的房子	Howard Chang / visual artist	26 minutes / 1997	Episodes of five different characters; a fragmented, two-part experimental video; just moods, not much happens	Program I
<i>The Unforgettable</i> (a.k.a. <i>97 Tons of Memories</i>) 97噸的回憶	Chu Shun / photographer	15 minutes / 30 seconds / 1997	A local Hong Kong person’s perspective, witnessing the end of an era and the dawn of a new one recorded on video	Program I
<i>Moving Home</i> (a.k.a. <i>Why I always forgot to start my video camera on important occasions</i>) 搬家:為什麼我總在重要的場合忘記了開機	Leung Ping-kwan / poet, professor in cultural studies, comparative literature and creative writing	20 minutes / 20 seconds / 1998	A series of events big and small, some major life decisions, and many trips out of Hong Kong – all within the year of 1997	Program I
<i>Fuss Fuss</i> 1997 九七混吉	Zhunzi, Chan Ya / (Zhunzi) comics artist (Chan Ya) newspaper columnist	30 minutes / 1997	A handycam captures over a dozen of interviews from random encounters with people from different walks of life, recorded around June 30, 1997	Program I
<i>Hands Over Belly Button</i> 手掩肚臍眼	Lo Kwai-cheung / professor in comparative literature and humanities, writer who has attempted theatre works and published a novel.	5 minutes / 33 seconds / 1997	Video record of a theatre piece the author produced on 1997 in 1997, noting a sense of ambivalence	Program I

(continued)

Table 20.2 (Continued)

Work title	Author / The expressive tools and intellectual resources they owned	Duration / year	Synopsis / Coverage	Program
<i>Hello, Goodbye</i>	Christine Loh / lawyer, human rights advocate and pro-democracy activist	6 minutes / 1997	A lyrical account of the transience of life where the familiar greetings serve as an allegory of Hong Kong's departure from Britain and return to China	Program II
<i>Pun Choy (Big Pot Food) 盤菜</i>	William Tang / fashion designer	6 minutes / 1997	A fashion show intercut with the preparation of <i>pun choy</i> to the soundtrack of P.K. Leung's cheeky chant about 1997	Program II
<i>People / In Searching / 1997 找人 ■1997</i>	Yank Wong / art director, graphic designer, painter, jazz musician	28 minutes / 28 seconds / 1997	A documentation of the process of conceiving a work on 1997 – full of conversations and in search of metaphors	Program II
<i>1997 Diary</i>	Iris Lee	6 minutes / 1997	An attempt to collect images and record events in order to “remember” 1997	Program II
<i>I Am 17 in 1997 年我十七歲</i>	Fan Yuk Man / winner of the Youth Category, IFVA, for submitters under 18	9 minutes / 1997	A simple record of images of the filmmaker and those around him in 1997	Program II

“Digital Biography of Hong Kong 1997, Program I & II” 九七故事:個人版(一)/(二) was part of a special program titled *History in the Making: Hong Kong 1997 歷史的締造*:人在九七 curated by the Hong Kong International Film Festival. The series also included a few documentaries: Evans Chan's *Journey to Beijing* (1998 / 111 minutes), Stanley Kwan's *Still Love You After All These* (1997 / 43 minutes), Ann Hui's *As Time Goes By* (1997 / 58 minutes), Danny Yung's *Question / Problem* (1996 / 60 minutes), Kate Leung's *Three Daughters* (1998 / 56 minutes), and Leong Po-chih and Leong Sze-wing's *Riding the Tiger* (1997 / 240 minutes).

Diaries of 1997: A Site of Experimentation, Voices of Everyday Life

In the rest of this chapter, I mainly focus on five works from Group 2 by non-filmmakers to examine how their sentiments can be studied and what historical knowledge is generated.

Though made by non-professionals, these works are comparable to experimental image-making. The idea of “video diaries,” also these works’ set purpose, liberates the individual authors from the burden of polished cinema, and especially the normative demand on story-telling or infotainment. Out of the necessity to articulate one’s mind on/for/around/against 1997, upon the producers’ request, they were confronted by the limited, elliptical raw material (footage) that raised the challenge of how to turn recorded fragments into an integrated work. The sheer fact that each of them had to struggle to apply a self-invented language to put the sight-and-sound fragments together placed them in performative moments of experimentation. This absence of a standard method to follow is also comparable to the situation of early cinema (pre-1906/1907 cinema) – a moment when moving-image creativity was not yet normalized into a standardized practice embodied by the Hollywood system, as Tom Gunning and many others have argued. Early Cinema (1890s to 1905/1906) was a moment rich in all kinds of free, playful attempts to look for things to film, and ways to piece shots (image fragments) together to form a story. The fixed and limited length of a roll of film, for example, encouraged or demanded innovative narrative closure within the duration of a shot, the shot as a complete scene, and the complete work. On other occasions, we find eclectic borrowings from existing art forms (e.g., photography and folk-tales) and cultural practices (e.g., news reports, magic, illustrated lectures, and vaudeville shows). It was a time when “editing” was better understood as slicing, juxtaposition, superimposition, collation, collage, the stringing together of a series of vignettes, or anything except normative “editing” for (space–time) continuity and (story) coherence. The creative activities of early cinema were driven by problem-solving – how to deal with resources at hand such as situations, potential events, tools and equipment, and their limitations – rather than by formal, aesthetic norms of “industrial standards.” All this explains the defended relation between early cinema and the avant-garde – the cultural practice of the former being a key source of inspiration for the latter (Gunning 1986: 64; Buckland 2006: 44–45, 48–49). In the works I shall discuss, I have detected a similar kind of free-flowing energy and sustained indeterminacy. These works also share the impact of “attractions,” the key idea that summarizes early cinema’s inspiration of the avant-garde, as Tom Gunning argues. “In the cinema of attractions, the spectator is not positioned as a voyeur absorbed into and spying on a self-enclosed narrative world; instead, it is exhibitionist, knowingly/reflexively addressing the

spectator and providing him or her with a series of views.” (Buckland 2006: 49) In these ‘97 diaries, the non-illusionistic and non-voyeuristic character of the works’ image-sound discourse posited the audience as acknowledged, active viewers instead of absorbed, passive, unseen spectators.

The politics of imaging I have described is integral to the identity politics the authors assumed in asserting the legitimacy of an individual’s writing history from below, from multiple subject positions with his/her attentiveness to personal, quotidian details. The experimental disposition of these video diaries marked out a space to show how they speak – their sentiments for 1997 address an area grossly neglected in historiography, and the re-injection of the HOEL.

Given the relatively recent conclusion of Hong Kong’s British colonial phase, I have chosen to cover a single historical moment, the year 1997 rather than a general narrative on Hong Kong’s postcoloniality. I find the historical accounts written so far about the handover fall short of my own intuitions and actual experience, and those of many people around me. Handover, resuming Chinese sovereignty, returning to China, the 1997 transitions, fifty years unchanged, one country two systems – none of these catchy terms in journalism or public discourse capture the complex sentiments of the everyday person. Sentiments are attitudes of mind, a category that often lacks a sufficient language – and certainly not in historical accounts that care mainly about the broad picture in the form of critical incidents. In Hong Kong, the summative, often impressionistic, stories at a grand social level have largely served the purpose of diagnosing political instability to generate prescriptions for economic stability. This is where the HOEL comes in. In Alf Luedtke’s words, the everyday life is meaningful and critical as it concerns the “agency of de-politicization.” (Luedtke 1983: 40)

In this study, I have examined five of the ten short video works from the program “Digital Biography of 1997” because they are the only works with viewing copies I could find within the time frame of my research. With lengths varying from 5 to 30 minutes, the five videos are very different in style, structure, and coverage of 1997, but all assert a highly personal view for a supposedly collectively shared moment of history. They are characterized by subdued emotions rather than pathetic expressiveness, ironic ambiguities rather than expositional explication. They all dismiss monumental values by highlighting what is trivial, absurd, accidental, and incomprehensible. In phenomenological terms, the video diaries studied are “thick descriptions” that open up and lay in front of us casual things that might have escaped our attention (Feldman 1998: 4). Whereas HOEL has justified the study of different traces of the quotidian, such as personal diaries, family account books, found photos, government public announcements, school curriculum plans and so on, this project particularly asserts the relevance and necessity of *artistic evidence* of the everyday for the affective dimensions of lived experiences embodying moral actions.

1997. Whose Story? The Moment? The Time-space of Thick Description

1997 is not easy to talk about. The monumental, political, grand story is of Britain and China, or Margaret Thatcher and Deng Xiaoping, as the two main protagonists, reducing the government of Hong Kong to an administrative–executive body, and the everyday Hong Kong person as an individual subject to grand decisions from above. My study objects, the five short videos made around 1997, are, in my words, strong articulations screaming, “Their big story has suppressed our small stories.”

Another feature of the public discourses of 1997 is to represent this piece of history as a process, with a timeline roughly following the formulation shown in Figure 20.1.

In this research, I have abandoned such assumed linear temporal configuration to consider 1997 as space-time (Deleuze 2007: 320), a sustained moment of diverse, rich sentiments, and a conceptual temporal zone that marks possibilities of emergence rather than a fixed measurable duration. In my previous work, I have argued for the historiographic productiveness of looking at a year via the lens of HOEL (Lai 2006: introduction). It invites historians to reconsider how we define “an event” by attending to more micro-level forms of human activities and lived experiences. The focus on a year calls for a new concept of event-time. Moving away from the forward flow of the temporal vector, I focus on 1997 for its thickness of description: I highlight the richness of isolated fragments and their potency for analysis as individual tableaux, vignettes or, in Luedtke’s term, “miniatures” (Luedtke 1989: x).

This group of works is relevant to the study of Hong Kong on the verge of decolonization, and to the general concern of the project of “everyday coloniality.” They show how states of mind and emotions can be perceived and studied with the textual construct of self-made media artifacts. Through the range of choices of subject matters, the naming of one’s video, intended or unintended details resulting from the camera’s automatic capacity to preserve, inclusions and exclusions of facts and audiovisual content and so on, I come into the presence of the complex everyday life via the videomakers’ subjective lens. These video diaries are pictures of minds (the overall impact of a video work) as much as the documentation of a mind writing itself (the narrative process of each work). They give us glimpses of

1841	1860	1898	1982	1984	1997	2047...
Hong Kong Island ceded to Britain	S. Kowloon leased to Britain	New Territories leased to Britain for 99 years	Beginning of Sino-British negotiation on the future of Hong Kong	Sino-British agreement signed	Hong Kong returned to China	50 years unchanged (maintaining Hong Kong’s own political system)

Figure 20.1 A timeline of the public discourse on Hong Kong’s handover.

human agency at work – how an individual (as a non-expert of film/video) constructs and invents a visual language adequate and satisfactory for personal articulations. Pictures of mind give thoughts and emotions in full complexity. This is the opposite of journalistic writing whereby an individual's sentiments often has to be reduced to handy adjectives or catchwords. It is not a coincidence that the videos I have studied all convey a strong sense of speechlessness, or the inadequacy of verbal utterances. In addition, these videos are showing and presenting processes of actions rather than representing a prevailing attitude in the midst of a great transition.

A (post-)phenomenological Study of Pictures of Minds and Sentiments: The Narratorial and Descriptive “I”

I have drawn my conceptual resources from ongoing (post-) phenomenological research. I not only focus on lived experiences in the lifeworld (van Manen 1984: 38), but also study the nature of experience – taking 1997 as a phenomenon in itself, how it has been lived, remembered, thought about, undermined, articulated, played off, or preserved. The “miniatures” I have reviewed point me to a special aspect of a *phenomenon*, that is, “*thoughtfulness*” of an individual (van Manen 1984: 36), which provides access to the videomakers’ inner sense of time expressed in doing (creating) (Blum 2006: 4). My task is then to tease out the phenomenological bent in these works by attending to their poetizing articulation. By poetry I do not mean lyricism or softness of feelings, but the importance of the overall sounding effect, manner of speech, acts of concealment, shape, and the use of symbolism and metaphoric devices that lead the viewer to discover the general structure as much as the details that accumulate step by step, little by little, to become the work’s soundings. In other words, the study of sentiments invites us to listen to each maker’s “voice” (implicit or explicit) and visual structuration. Since none of the authors was a professional filmmaker, the question of competence transposes to that of self-directed appropriation of the film language. These video works are their phenomenological descriptions, which is also their praxis via language configuration (Blum 2006: 4).

At what point does phenomenological research intersect with moving-image studies? This mandates the explication of the nature of visibility and a critique of the normative configuration of film language and narrativity, all implicated in history writing, for the rigorous study of daily experiences.

According to Gilles Deleuze’s two-volume *Movement Image* and *Time Image*, cinema is not just aesthetic moderation easily classified into the two camps of realist and expressionist cinema. To Deleuze, cinema points us to the virtualization of time as *sustained duration* (as opposed to quantifiable measurement). Most importantly, he argues that cinema is a new form of consciousness creating new *modes of*

attentiveness to the world by stretching our range of perceptual experience and cognitive activities, a view that is also echoed in the writings of critical theorist Walter Benjamin and the late director Raul Ruiz. The *production of difference* in the moving image against other media establishes not only a new sense of the world, but also new experience of time articulated in the narrative body of a moving-image work. In other words, the vocabulary of the moving image also encapsulates conceptual categories commensurate with what phenomenological historians call the “inner sense of time.” Premised on the “present continuous tense” of a shot, the idea of “time-image” proposes, among other things, the de-hierarchization of levels of consciousness – so that dream state or moments awake, past or present, illusion or mental seeing, speaking and acting etc. are in fluid circulating exchange. Alluding also to Bergson’s philosophy of time and the new realism of the French *nouveau roman*, Deleuze compares the “time-image” character of cinema to the camera’s *thick description* of the object, also that of the perceptual subject (the spectator). An image or image sequence, therefore, invites the analyst to engage in *thick description* to look beyond what was intended, and to benefit from the “surpluses” of intended meanings. This concept of Deleuze’s has strong affinity with what Walter Benjamin calls the “optical unconscious” capacity of the photographic image due to its automatic, mechanical reproduction of what is in front of the camera. A photograph remembers (retains) more than the bearer of the camera did.

While narrative is a key concept in moving image, its basic definition has been historically hijacked to substantiate mainly plot-based story-telling in mainstream cinema. Such a narrow use of the term “narrative” as the equivalent of “story” results in our overt focus on the condensed, general idea of a time-based work, whereas our attention to the work’s “body” is obstructed. Definitions of “narrative” may vary, but I argue that a basic description of “narrative” should contain the following:

- 1 the arrangement of components in a specific sequential/procedural order that
- 2 inserts/invents new relations (cause-and-effect, flows and gaps), which
- 3 amount to the formation of an argument, the arrival at a picture of reality or a state of moods.

To achieve all this involves the mobilization of an expressive medium’s material resources. In some cases, step-by-step forward motion is more important, whereas in others the overall trajectory – of how a point (in the beginning) maneuvers to arrive at a very different point (in the end) – is where the essence of a work lies. According to Blum, theorist in phenomenological historiography, there is an important distinction to make between facts following a specific “temporal thought path” and “non-temporal fact.” He cited the following example: “ $3 + 4 = 7$ ” is not the same as “ $3^2 - 2 = 7$ ” although the final value is the same (Blum 2006: 4). The total

sum of “7” alone in both is “non-temporal fact” whereas the two operations are two very different “temporal thought paths.”

A phenomenological view values the operative process, thus also the differing trains of thought over a summative conclusion. Based on this view, I have set up a few phenomenological synonyms of “narrative” useful for my study of the five video miniatures: *thought path*, *trains of thoughts*, *logic and structure of event for an individual*, *image transition*, and *alternation between speech modes*. These are important analytical categories. To point out that the miniatures are all anxious, for example, is inadequate. What matters is how anxiety unfolds to individual authors as unique image-narrative processes. In the works I have studied, I have detected a tension between narration and description. These works self-consciously refuse to move forward in time, nor look backward onto the past. Rather than recollection, retrospection or future projection, they carve out a sustained, isolated moment of the living-present state of mind. The cyclic structure of narrative time in all five works is also the dissolution of the linear, pushing narration over the threshold to description, favoring a presentness of experience.

The “I” is “we” – this is the contribution of visual/auto-ethnography. Phenomenology is more than just subjective experience. According to David Carr, “phenomenologists in the Husserlian tradition have developed some very sophisticated concepts and descriptions for dealing with consciousness from the first-person point of view” (Carr). He argues, moreover, that the first person has both the singular and plural forms – the “I” alluding to and constructing a “we.” Whereas the histories of “we” derive from the histories of “I,” the construction and articulated membership of a hypothetical “we” takes root in language, observable through analysis of language activities. Joan McCarthy, in her thorough examination of Daniel Dennett and Paul Ricoeur’s casting of the self in narrative terms, argues that “self is best conceived... as a culturally mediated narrative unity of action...” (McCarthy 2007: Introduction) In this light, narrative coherence is a way to make elliptical, fragmented memories and experiences intelligible. The construction of a narrative trajectory requires fragments not only to be parsed into beginning, middle and end, but also to form ordered sequences that generate arguments and persuasions. The “what” and “how” and intentionality of narrative are equally important.

All the five works in question adopt a first-person visual narrative approach. As personal diaries, they self-consciously stand as works of ethics and political, social action. I therefore keep the following questions at hand throughout my study: what is it that each of the narrative makers is purposefully doing? What are they making intelligible and how do they make it happen? What fragments has each one of these makers positively included and how do they individually operate on these fragments? My attention is not so much on the unity and continuity of the self over time as the “self in motion” in specific moments of articulation, which is the enactment of moral reasoning driven by sentiments, and a self-dialogue that unfolds what is being discovered. In Hume’s anti-rationalist terms, reason serves

and obeys passion; sentiments are providers of reasons leading to action (Hume 2003). In this light, the temporal–conceptual moment of 1997 is one of intensifying and variegated emotions on the verge of an outburst, yet turned into narrative reasoning materialized in the artistic containment of a video diary.

To achieve the above, I shall discuss three aspects in each work: first, sentiments as narratives, that is, temporal thought paths, logic of event, and inner temporal constitution; second, sentiments as visualization – articulation of an inner sense of time, and range of perceptual and cognitive articulation; and third, the use of variational theory to sort out what is variant and invariant in these works against the standard 1997 story (Ihde 2009: 7) – coverage, time span, and, especially, “surpluses.”

Belly Buttons, Absent Cameras, Moving House, Fooling around: Sentiments Performing Moral Reasoning in Five Video Diaries...

The video authors’ 1997 articulations are no representation of the average Hong Konger. These makers are each trained and working with a very specific language of their social group and profession to articulate their subjectivities. We have a poet (the late Leung Ping-kwan), a novelist (Lo Kwai-cheung), two scholars in cultural studies and comparative literature (Leung and Lo), an artist in political comics (Zhunzi), a newspaper columnist (Chan Ya), a painter who is also an art director (Yank Wong), and a photographer (Chu Shun). Based on the production condition of the program, these works were all made in a “shoot-on-the-run” style on shoestring budgets (Loh and Toh), and all makers were intensely engaged with mediating what they feel via the language of moving image at the same time touching the limits of its established norms.

Though called “’97 biographies,” these works are highly personal diaries. The use of a time-based medium suggests these makers’ self-directed segmentation of lived experiences and free-flowing emotions from the chaotic flux of daily life. Their effort to impose a beginning and an end is defining their logic of an event, also to assign “significance” to what they experienced, even if what is significant can sometimes be nonsense. They rendered images into a narrative body, making the establishing shot, proportioning of visual material, the flow and closure the basic grammar of their thought process.

The Unforgettables (Chu Shun)

The Unforgettables (a.k.a. *97 Tons of Memories*) displays upfront selectivity and the heaviness of remembering. It is the only one of the five diaries that deploys images of the evening of the handover ceremony on 30 June 1997 as the only

visual material for the whole work. These images may seem ordinary, but they amount to highly personal poetics. The whole work can be described as a 15½-minute prolonged montage sequence. The cut between images serves no purpose of continuity but, rather, isolates each image into a photographic surface pregnant with desperation that finds no precise translation into words. Almost like a still-picture series, the image discourse of photographer Chu Shun preserves for us miniature sets that at once gaze at the spotlight center stage of the drama of the farewell-exit of the British administration and spill over to street corners where ordinary people’s self-made festive venues are in fact counter-celebrations in the form of protest, demonstration, aimless hanging out, and playful subversion.

Though with nothing but images on 30 June, there is a significant omission, a prominent exception. There are no images that suggest the presence of Chinese leadership except for a short sequence of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA) marching into town, proceeding through the streets of Hong Kong in tanks – an image deliberately invoking the tanks on the Tian’anmen Square in June 1989. Reviewing the work against the classical three-act structure – “beginning – middle (two climatic moments) – end” – Figure 20.2 lays out the thought-path of the work, showing the “unusual distribution” of images of the evening’s event.

It is obvious that a main function of the beginning and the middle portion is to anticipate the “end” which takes up 7 minutes, almost half of the entire work. This ending portion mainly contains scenes of Hong Kong’s last British governor, Chris Patten, exiting Hong Kong with his family. The last 5 of the 7 minutes, in particular, contains eight different scenarios of Patten, five of which with Patten waving his hands to bid farewell in slow motion. As each new farewell shot adds on to the series with a different angle, the shots evolve in their function. They no longer simply signify or represent “farewell” – they show the texture of emotions, the very presence of the act of farewell, through the details of the face and the different ways Patten waved his hands and looked at the crowd. The middle session that leads to this climatic end contains mainly images of various things people did

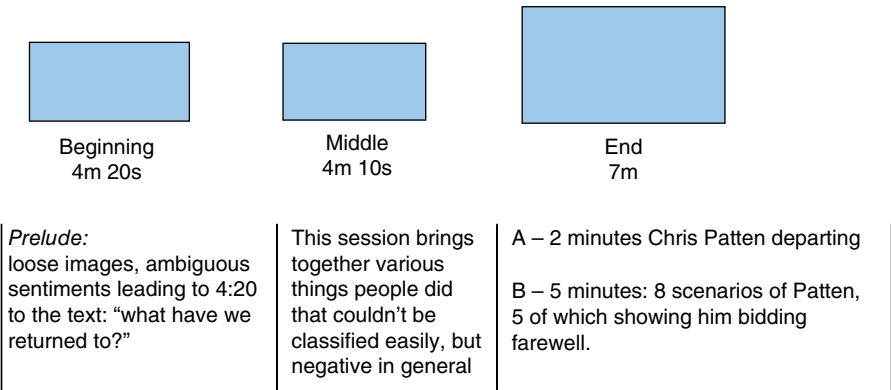


Figure 20.2 The thought-path of *The Unforgettables* (a.k.a. 97 Tons of Memories).

on the street that couldn't be conveniently classified but which had a negative overtone, whereas the first four and half minutes of the work contain loose images of ambiguous sentiments leading to conclusive text on screen – the query “What have we returned to?”

This work is rich in what I call “surpluses” – details that are there for their own sake without cohering with other parts to facilitate a story. These “surpluses” fill up the entire middle session: panhandlers on the street, partying expats, the carnivalesque make-up people wore on the street, the shops that stayed open for business, crowded streets and who occupied them, the variety of protestors and placards screaming the causes of demonstration.

The Unforgettables is one evening (a few hours) turned into 15½ minutes. It is one big event about exit and arrival – a relentless exit (of British administrative, military, and naval personnel) with a pointed arrival (of the Chinese PLA) thickened by ordinary people on the street who do not fit into any classification. The piece's narrative closure is a lingering, heavy exit of colonial power with an absent take-over. No great speeches. No Chinese leaders. No swearing-in ceremony. The thought pattern brings before us a state of mind that is almost a total refusal to anticipate a new beginning by giving it no narrative time and space. The moment of exit becomes the recurrent eternal – it is a sustained moment that gathers immense emotions without re-distribution. The out-of-proportion emphasis on Patten to me suggests less of nostalgia for the colonial rule than the lack of faith in the leap into the embrace of Mother China, which here becomes one big cliffhanger. Narrative looseness and the free assemblage of street-level activities seek a deliberate contrast with most other treatments of the 1997 handover in public discourses.

Moving Home (Leung Ping-kwan, a.k.a. Ye Si, 1949–2013)

The narrative of Leung Ping-kwan's *Moving Home* (a.k.a. *Why I always forgot to start my video camera on important occasions*) has no typical images of 1997. Unlike Chu Shun's *The Unforgettables*, Leung's response to the assignment is a totally personal account, with the “I” speaking, working, drifting, and making experiences throughout. The work has a chronological framework of one year from month to month, an open structure that allows anything occurring within that period to find a place in the narrative. He chose to recount key personal events of the year, the places he had visited, alternating with poems he wrote, all subjugated to the emotive tuning of the fiendish music of *Unsettled Spirits*, a performance he was part of in 1997. The apparently wandering images were structured into episodes introduced by seven different road sequences with nine defined events and three poems scattering through the 20-minute work. Taking a time-frame of roughly a year, Leung gently deposited the handover evening onto a thick stream of personal problems and drifting moments.

The episodic division in *Moving Home* reveals Leung's logic of event. The nine "events" named in this video were only partially caught on camera. An "event" in this work is not defined as the entire completion of the course of happenings marked by a final consequence; an event exists as a portion of the ongoing process, like a slice of life. Such slice points to a broader conceptual event that is referred to but without full exposé. The handover night of 30 June is one of the events but is only there to recall his friends. Table 20.3 details the nine events and their visual presence via camera treatment.

Whereas the numerous incidents were preserved as momentary fragments, the one big *event* in this video is retreating and restoring order while the new house, after moving, was still in chaos, as we find out towards the end of the video. The "tidying house" sequence is also the most elaborate sequence in the image discourse – the most concrete *moments of daily experience* – where activities and the process of actions are supplemented by the author's elaborate confession with full camera presence. This sequence is also the climatic exit of the whole work, as if it is what the year-long journeying anticipates.

The logic of inclusion–exclusion in *Moving House* renders intelligible the author's personal decisions to have his personal affairs crossing path with the 1997 handover and yet to underscore its relative insignificance through deliberate dissociation. The theme of deliberate dissociation also cuts through the entire work. Moving

Table 20.3 *Moving Home* – the nine defined events in 1997

<i>Event</i>	<i>Camera Presence</i>
Experimental cross-media performance: <i>Unsettled Spirits</i> 陰魂不散 (February 1997)	On camera
Moving house	Only road shots and interior of the new home on camera
Changing job	Only generic shots – buildings of the two universities on camera
Poetry reading + forum on Hong Kong culture (London – South Banks) (May 1997)	A few fragments of sustained action – reading in public – on camera
Vancouver – Hong Kong film festival (mid-May 1997)	Not on camera, only a few shots of streets of Vancouver
Family visit (mid-May 1997)	Shot of a female child briefly talking, not highlighted
Handover evening (June 1997)	Casual images of friends idling
Conference on poetry in China's Wu Yi Shan 武夷山 (July 1997)	Shots of walking uphill through the woods
Tidying house after moving	On camera with elaborate footage: Leung being interviewed, showing books and publications to the camera

house as a result of changing jobs is *withdrawal by choice* – from the micro politics of the work place, and from the noisy urban environment – which sounds almost like self-salvation. The author has recited a total of three *poems* throughout the video – on coloniality (*In Response to Cecil Clementi* – 1997), the strange space of his apartment (*Something Strange has Happened to this House*), and on the sense of alienation of immigrant subjects in the overseas Chinese diaspora (*Eggplants*). There are two segments on *theory-making* – one on what is Hong Kong culture, and the other on how he wrote his poems. The video also includes various *folk material*, including the love poem of Mu Dan 穆旦, Cantonese love songs by Chiu Tsz-yung, Canto-pop *Tears and Laughters* 啼笑姻緣, and a poem by former Hong Kong Governor Sir Cecil Clementi (1925–30).

Of the five video works, *Moving Home* has the broadest perceptual-cogito range of varied thickness. Its numerous poems name concrete everyday objects such as a tomato and furniture, inviting us to see with our mind's eye. They contain multiple voices – some lamenting, some recounting, some raising queries. The poems read as subtitles address the viewer's intellect, whereas the recitation of the poems in the voiceover provides a narrative layer of pure sounding. The image discourse shows experimental theatre performance in action, road shots with varied yet similar road scenes. There is the recounting of the many conferences the author attended, but we also hear his oral exegesis on issues of Hong Kong culture, his own poetic methods, confession and interviews. Whereas the title of the work singles out the most important event of all personal events, the secondary title prompts us to imagine all the images we should have seen had the camera been on at the right time, framing the entire visible image discourse a deliberate stand-in for a big absence.

The visual narrative has sequences of a point of view shot from inside a journeying vehicle looking out onto the road as the organizing event. Using a multilateral structure – images of a road journey alternate with images of a performance based on his poems, and voiceover that narrates the key events of the year – the work is actually a list of folk and popular artifacts that “characterize” Hong Kong to the author. More or less midway through the work, we see on screen events of the evening of Hong Kong's handover, and the author's confession on the voiceover (my translation into English), marking the (anti-)climatic reference to this monumental moment:

[voiceover:] While the handover ceremony was on, I and my folks were hiding in the Hong Kong Arts Centre behind the official venue to watch the ceremony on TV, or to be part of what was then the popular type of gathering called patriotic songs concert. *I had my camera on, but I had captured no images of Chris Patten in tears, Tung Chee-hwa's swearing in to office, nor that of the new Legco members in putonghua, nor the marching into town of the PLA into Hong Kong at midnight. The only shots we had were the silly faces of friends. We didn't even record the alternative ceremony of the democratic camp and their leader Martin Lee, who occupied the balcony of the Legco building to claim, “We'll be back.” But we did record a very serious speech of a friend who is normally very playful...* (added emphasis)

In this video, the experiencing subject is bound to space and place. The single moment of 1997 is mapped across the continents, from Hong Kong, China, London to Vancouver. Subject formation occurs in place-making and the inhabiting of the world. What contributes to this cluster of formation includes “inhuman, nonhuman, and more-than-human forces.” (Lea 2009) Like the atmosphere of a place, which can be understood by adding up visible components of a surrounding, sentiments also take an emergent process (Liebst 2012: 8105–1). In this work, sentiments are not asserted, but transported, through the repeated return of the road sequences, each moving into the heart of a new living/urban environment. The continuing process of adding up is more important than a stable condition of sentiment. The evolving sentiment, from place to place, from moment to moment, is the very performance of a moral response of an empirical subject, which is to retreat.

“Time flow” in the work may appear to be linear as the visit to one place supersedes that to another, and yet the whole video is a huge current in one direction with no return. The manifest episodic structure simply highlights the simultaneity of events. Spatially speaking, all distributaries of events, conversations, thought-moments and poetic articulation conjoin in the new home in an isolated area of Hong Kong close to the Hong Kong–mainland border – the end of time, the end of emotive agitations, the end of mental drifts, a total exit, and a new page of life yet to be written, or not at all. The question of “narrative” matters: it is not about forms and styles, but about the effect of how a spectator is engaged amidst a stream of varied fragments adding up to a constructed whole, highlighting narrativity (Sternberg 2011: 37, 47). There is a view of 1997 from within – positively.

People / In Searching / 1997 (Yank Wong)

In this piece, the image discourse comprises mainly atmospheric images of the city space of Hong Kong from the point of view of the maker from inside a moving car. Structured and admitted to be a road movie, the gloomy images of Hong Kong streets stream on with scattered inserts of a few Hong Kongers learning to fly with a Scottish coach in Inner Mongolia, and a homeless person whose temporary dwelling was found to have been demolished upon the author’s return visit.

The audio discussion is pregnant with self-reflexive moments of the producing process of Digital Biography of 1997. The maker calls home to get producer Stella Sze’s phone number. The maker Yank Wong calls Sze. Their discussion is interrupted a few times. Jokes are made about these interruptions that there are probably spies hacking his phone line. At one point, it is the wife trying to phone in. At another point a long-time family friend called to ask where the author’s mother is and how he is doing. Despite the interruptions, Wong manages to get Sze’s affirmation of a project for the program that we don’t actually get to see. End of conversation. End of road trip. End of work.

People / In Searching / 1997 is about possible stories and the potentiality of narratives. The bilateral, audio-versus-visual, narrative structure calls attention to the obvious gap between image and sound. The work as it ends up is in a way the problematization of the commission – as the assignment was completed, but the planned work never got made. It is a refusal of the project in the sense that there is not much to look at in the completed work – a denial to the obligation to affirmatively offer visual information on Hong Kong's return to China. Yet it is not true that nothing happened and the work meant to be was not entirely absent. Talking is making. The conversations were speech acts of a clearly defined work executed in a temporal thought path rich in arguments, descriptions, comparison, justification, and hypothetical thinking. *People* asserts itself as a moment of dialogues, thus also the very act of articulation.

Fuss Fuss (Zhunzi and Chan Ya)

Political comic artist, Zhunzi, and daily contributor to local Chinese press, Chan Ya, turn the heavy political atmosphere into light-hearted, streetwise action research with a casual camera begging quick answers from caught-unaware pedestrians as they repeatedly probed the question, "What is your view on 1997?"

Fuss Fuss reminds those with a basic knowledge of the history of the documentary the work of French anthropologist / filmmaker Jean Rouch and sociologist Edgar Morin – *Chronique d'un été* (Chronicle of a Summer) published in 1961. The work began with Rouch and Morin's research in the summer of 1960 when a walking camera caught people on the streets of Paris to extract their immediate response to the question, "Are you happy?" Standing by the principles of *cinéma vérité*, Rouch asserts a theory of moving image documentary by which the "fly on the wall" assumptions of the camera (notably the thesis of Direct Cinema in the US) surrenders to the fact that the camera is an active agent, and that camera presence in documentary induces positive knowledge-production. The agency of the makers solicits realities, thoughts and sentiments that are potentially there but need to be drawn out. Rouch's work is a reflexive statement as it includes not only the camera as a research agent, but also meetings between researchers and between researchers and subjects in heated discussion. Zhunzi and Chan's work, while asserting the performativity of the documentary moment, has a more single-minded archiving focus. The work could have been longer or shorter in its work of sampling responses. The final ending of the piece is also the assertion of its endless life and possibilities. The diversity and variety of responses from the many people captured on camera have one feature in common: they all stray away from a serious contemplation of the question, be they a security guard, a young passer-by or intellectuals. Hilariousness and light-heartedness permeate to subdue serious political commentary. It is a sampling of "voices" for their textures over content.

***Hands Over Belly Button* (Lo Kwai-cheung)**

In *The Unforgettables* the “I” is presented as “we”; in *Moving House*, the “we” gradually subsides to “I”; in *People*, there is only “they”; and in *Fuss Fuss* there is only “we.” In Lo’s *Hands Over Belly Button*, there is only the “I” – nothing but the “I.” The voiceover tells us that this is about a theatre piece called *Desires of the Belly Button* produced by the author in the year 1997, based on his own novel. The image discourse is a truncated drift through the different corners of a theater, from the stage to the back to the audience, from the rehearsals to the performance to the empty seats without the audience. Narratively, the spectator is locked up within the theater space. The path of thought is shaky. The voice, which seeks to explain, explains nothing. An organic relation between the speech and the image discourse is simply absent in the entire 5 minutes of narrative time. With a single-minded voiceover, the author delivers the failure of language to convey unspeakable sentiments – except that what can be articulated is a state of inarticulateness, perceivable only in space, through a double circular survey (of camera penetration) between back-stage and front-stage, between what is on stage and what is down stage. From back-stage to front-stage, the penetrating motion of the camera draws a circular journey that takes us all the way back to the beginning point. Director to actor: do they really understand the lines they speak? Director to audience in the dark: are they really watching? Circular time points to no past no future, sustaining only a sense of futility – space is time, time is space, the total collapse of a fathomable world.

The most productive, positive line in the voiceover is “1997 is like a belly button” followed by an explication of the thought. “A belly button is something that has always been there. But unless you pull up your clothes to look at it, you’re likely to forget about its existence.” This is not a comment about 1997’s insignificance, but a proactive, forceful negation, a climatic point of the breakdown of all sensible communication.

Performed, Enacted Sentiments for 1997 Forming a Contingent Field of Cultural Production

The five video diaries together form a cluster of contrasted soundings and diverse forms of place-making and self-making, each driven by a different state of mind. Chu Shun’s *Unforgettables* dwells upon nothing but images as the most tangible reality, asserting gestures, postures and appearances. The unforgettable is also the unspeakable. P.K. Leung commits to the “making” of his own everyday life while fully aware of the grand moment of history he was living through. His concrete making began with moving house necessitated by changing jobs. He also replaces the political grandness of Hong Kong’s handover with his own series of grand

moves, combining artistic activities, citation of folk cultural heritage, and the emerging presence of the Chinese diaspora. Yank Wong's 1997 is the positive containment of attempted, possible, and unconfirmed stories imaginable only through fragments of raw footage compiled alongside a series of interrupted phone discussion of whose story is worth telling. *People / In Searching / 1997* is meaning-driven: the "possible alternative meanings of 1997" is the unambiguous agenda, except that he only shows us the quest and its process and minimum glimpses of what he had researched on camera. The narrative shape and trajectory of *Fuss Fuss* command an open-ended story that could have been much longer and broader in coverage had the camera continued to roll – perhaps to suggest a similar work be made and remade intermittently.

A key feature cutting through the five works analyzed is "stagnation" in time contrasted to a free flow of space. The prominent, determined refusal to move forward pertains to a "no" for the projection of a future, the refusal to assert hope and change. Everything is in the presence – also the presentness of things. The camera in these works is phenomenally fleeting, effectuating a swift spatial transportation among locations of personal concerns, domestic doings, and accidental presence of things going by. All these five works are stylistically marked by the free flow of images – the appearance of street views of Hong Kong and her people constantly darting by, dashing away, crossing the path of the camera, swiftly dispersing, creating visual ellipses that are to be filled up by utterances of the individual "I" in multiplicity. These video diaries deliver no cliché recollection, nor forced expectation. As texts of enactment and moral actions in contingent moments of political upheaval and social instability, they are driven by sentiments of refusal, a divorce from a notion of time that is about progress, about forward motion. Their moral actions take the form of negation. Dissolved linearity of time. Asserted realism of space and place.

Let me return to the experimental use of "diary film" as revisionist, alternative historiography with the above observation in place. To Jonas Mekas, whose works led to the use of the term, "diary films" are short notes and shot with some regularity. In diary films, the maker looks back to reflect upon what has gone past, compelled by the need to be connected with one's interiority. He also points to a sense of immediacy in the need to record in the process of daily encounters, "In keeping a notebook with the camera, the main challenge became how to react to it in such a way that the footage would reflect what I feel that very moment." There is, however, no objective diary possible. Filming, thinking, and reflecting is one undifferentiated act and an integrated process without the maker's full control of what's around her/him (Mekas 1972/1978: 191). Jerome Hill extends the idea of "diary films" to autobiography in experimental film (via his work *Film Portrait*), which in my view is "diary film" with a stronger portraiture function and more conclusive observation. He invites us to consider the "difficult congruence of linguistic and cinematic time-structures": a portrait via film is always also a portrait of "the self of film"; the very act of constructing a chronology via film questions the "authority of

chronology and the truth of imagery.” In this way, the memory and intention that incite a moving image work “enter an indeterminate arena” premised on the conditions of production and the apparatuses (Sitney 1977–78: 202, 207).

It is important to re-cast these works as both diaries and autobiographies as well as what lies in between. Sitney draws a distinction between the diary film and autobiography, “[the diary film] does not choose a fictive vantage point to reflect upon the past; in fact, it has next to no reference to the past. It would offer, instead, a series of discontinuous presents.” This can be another way to qualify the “stagnancy” in time I pointed out a few paragraphs away in the context of experimental cinema. “The diary film draws upon the pure lyric, and often becomes indistinguishable from it. It arises out of the filmmaker’s self-consciousness about the temporality of filming and editing. It explores that temporality as if it were the time of living.” (Sitney 1977–78: 245, 246) I also argue that the commission nature of the pieces made them at once diary, autobiography, and history. I have thus focused on the effect and modes of “presencing” – by locating where the time of cinema and the time of experience collides, thus a uniquely mediated form of historical knowledge.

Somewhat between “diary” and “autobiography,” these five works from the “Digital Biography of Hong Kong 1997” program share a few features in their work of image description:

- 1 Heavy use of montage: invented meanings lie between shots raising the question “what is the meaning of a cut?” Montage is not the same as editing. The shot and image sequences acquire autonomy that allows each to be viewed for its perceptual details – I call it a grammar of the single image.
- 2 The narrative trajectory and thought paths prominently gather free-flowing and accumulating emotions. In all of these works, perhaps except *Fuss Fuss*, the final session of the work is the ultimate flush of gathering emotions, marking a narrative closure that is at best an emotive exit whereby nothing really gets resolved.
- 3 Each work is the maker’s presentation of what could be preserved as the process of “1997” – the emergence of self, the striking of new consciousness, and the production of new knowledge – to give (a mediated) form to what would otherwise not have existed as part of the experiential life world. What was potentially possible became concrete, positive utterances via narrative enactment, which is also self performance. This is in line with the nature of phenomenological writing. “Phenomenological research does this by reintegrating part and whole, the contingent and the essential, value and desire... It makes us thoughtfully aware of the consequential in the inconsequential, the significant in the taken-for-granted.” (van Manen 1984: 36)

While personal sentiments had no place in the progress story of Hong Kong’s postcolonial nationalist reunification in public discourses, the cultural elite

covered in this study deployed available resources within the established institution to mark out the space and place to turn what was absent into perceivable experiences with rich details of sight and sound. On one level of cultural production, non-commercial TV producer Stella Sze extended her professional ethos to turn the wandering, doubtful minds of the video authors into concrete writing and positive knowledge. The platform to publish these works was no small event – the Hong Kong International Film Festival (HKIFF), which then had a known history of defending humanitarian rights against official “anxieties.” 1997 in my study is not a transition, nor a threshold, but a temporal structure with many voices, a broad range of sentiments in carefully rendered temporal paths of thoughts of rich perceptual details. These apparently ordinary video programs, however, form a “place” where these makers could enact their moral reasoning as members of the cultural elite who were not anonymous personalities. It is a platform that cannot be replaced by newspaper writing or critical scholarly essays – thanks to the differential surplus the languages of experimental moving image affords.

Other than the six authors of the five works discussed in this essay, other invited participants were one way or other “celebrities” within their own field, such as pro-democracy and feminist human rights fighter, lawyer by profession, Christine Loh, fashion designer William Tang, and Fan Yuk-man, fresh winner of IFVA’s Youth Category. As we hear producer Stella Sze say in her phone conversation with Yank Wong, captured in Wong’s video piece, she was looking for personal and experimental visions and would not want a work that looks just like a good TV documentary. Sze heard from Wong two apparently unrelated cases he had researched on camera, and readily filled in the gaps with the many possible linkages one could build between the two stories via “1997.” In Sze’s mind, the work-to-be should be a work of juxtaposition of events that happened to occur around 1997. She also mentioned a couple of times how Hani Mio, the other producer, would be open-minded enough to welcome such treatment. Now, as audience of *People*, we are able to imagine the work with Hong Kong people learning to “fly” in Mongolia and a homeless Hong Kong person juxtaposed – a mental work imaginable in our mind’s eye that was never made.

While preparing for this essay, I also discovered the important role Hong Kong Arts Centre (HKAC) had played in providing a platform for many works that would have fitted this discussion. Starting 1999, the HKIFF has included IFVA winning works to be a must-have program as part of its local works showcase. Reviewers Loh and Toh (2008) make the following observation:

This enlightened move proved that indigenous shorts had gained official recognition, in spite of their non-mainstream nature. Many of these videos pushed the limits of story-telling in fictionalized accounts or documentaries while others were passionate statements of life in post-1997 Hong Kong... Without resolving their complexes of anxiety and helplessness, it is clear that Hong Kong’s independent

short films have matured artistically... This medium, much cheaper and therefore more accessible to fledgling filmmakers, has already started to replace the celluloid film of the past as far as short films are concerned.

I find the above comments over-optimistic. I feel the following introductory notes to a special program on 1997 presented at the Hong Kong Arts Centre align more intuitively with my personal sentiments. The overt irony suggests the necessity to move beyond discourses into the domain of emotions:

On 1 July 1997, Hong Kong entered a new era, we are told. After over 150 years of colonial rule, we need to be re-educated, we are told. Now the British have gone, we need to learn about the real history of Hong Kong, the hidden crimes of colonialism, the genuine Chinese values and, most important of all, the love of our true motherland, we are told. A new Hong Kong needs a new sensibility, a new life and this should be nurtured through education, we are told. (From the introductory notes to the program "Sentimental Education," *Artslink*, October 1997, Hong Kong Arts Centre.)

At this point in the history of cinema studies, every attempt to make sense of a moving-image text is subject to the challenge of audience's meaning-making and non-partisan usage. In this essay, I have made a strong statement about how in the context of HOEL my method is beyond pure textual analysis due to my attempt to extract personal sentiments in the modes of unfolding as a critique to monumental history. Rather than pursuing the ethnography of usage and readership, I would engage the makers with the following questions.

Is the stagnation of time, or the impossibility of looking back and forward still your general sentiment?

If you were to make another video now, 17 years after the handover, what would you do?

I would also ask:

Who else do I want to entrust my camera with?

I would also like to invite Stella Sze to work out a sequel to her project:

With what you have experienced in these seventeen years, how would you re-conceive a similar project for now, and who would you show it to?

I maintain that film/video texts are not only social texts, but also texts of artistic/creative response to the social and political with historiographic value. They also form an unexamined domain of cultural activism – to be studied side by side with our government's programmed activities for a creative industry.

Notes

- 1 The notion of the everyday is notably read in the works of Fernand Braudel. Its intellectual sources are multiple, including, to name a few, works by the English Marxist tradition such as E.P. Thompson and Raymond Williams, French critical theorist Henri Lefebvre and Michel de Certeau. The term *alltagsgeschichte* (history of everyday life, abbreviated to HOEL) I use here refers to a long-standing school of history-writing led by Alf Luedtke, whose works began with the quest of including the voices and lived experiences of the largely silent working-class people in Germany during the Nazi period. Over decades, Luedtke has gathered scholars and historians from around the world who identify with HOEL. The author of this essay has been part of a 3-year project led by Luedtke in collaboration with Hanyang University in Seoul, called “Everyday Coloniality.” In 2010–2012, about a dozen scholars of Asian history gathered each year to systematically lay out the agenda of HOEL, looking in particular to open up new methodologies.

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Commentary

The Dynamics of Off-Centeredness in Hong Kong Cinema

Yingjin Zhang

The chapters in this section on narrative and aesthetics in Hong Kong cinema address a wide array of topics, but four of them stand out in my view: genre, geography, audience, and affect. First, in terms of genre, Fiona Yuk-wa Law maps the Hong Kong tradition of New Year films (*he sui pian*),¹ Bliss Cua Lim situates recent horror films in a reorientation of pan-Asian cinema, Giorgio Biancorosso examines intricate layers of sonic and visual imageries in Wong Kar-wai's art films, and Linda Lai traces private sentiments in diary films as a neglected body of independent documentary. Second, geography is intertwined with genre in Hong Kong cinema, and Hong Kong filmmakers' variegated geographic imagination – polylocal, transregional, intranational, and global – accounts for shifting genre boundaries and mixed genre narratives, from the preference for light-hearted action and comedy in New Year films to geopolitically sensitive border-crossing stories in Applause Pictures' transnational production of horror, from Wong Kar-wai's auteurist kaleidoscope of citations of transnational music to independent documentary artists' self-positioning during Hong Kong's anxiety-ridden transition to China's sovereignty in 1997. Third, audience has become an inevitable factor in the filmmakers' consideration of narrative and aesthetics, and the scholars' discussion of a dynamic of audience inclusion and exclusion through the audience's cultural and linguistic competence further complicates issues of genre and geography. Finally, affect comes into focus when contradictory sentiments – from the nostalgia for a happy family reunion in New Year films to the ghostly yearning for home in a pan-Chinese context, from a geography of affects through a sonic cartography of Hong Kong's globalized cityscape to miniature sentiments in local and translocal everyday life – are deliberately juxtaposed and problematized in production design and audience reception.

The four scholars in this section have drawn insights from diverse theoretical frameworks, from Mikhail Bakhtin's concepts of the carnival and chronotope (Law) to Ackbar Abbas's hypothesis of posthumous socialism vis-à-vis post-socialism (Lim), from the aesthetics of space, time, music, and affect (Biancorosso)

to a phenomenological view of everyday life and its appropriation as alternative historiography through thick description (Lai). It is not my intention to reiterate arguments presented in these four chapters. Instead, I use my initial summary of genre, geography, audience, and affect as a springboard to explore, in redoubled pairs, four additional clusters of issues – space-time, nostalgia, reception, and performance – so as to reflect on interrelated aspects of narrative and aesthetics in Hong Kong cinema.

Space-Time/Genre

“Space-time” is a concept Doreen Massey theorizes in opposition to the tradition of privileging time over space and place in Western thought. For her, “space must be conceptualized integrally with time,” and the resulting view of “space-time as a configuration of social relations” necessarily yields to a reconceptualization of the specifically spatial as “an inherently dynamic simultaneity” – “as an ever shifting social geometry of power and signification.” (Massey 1994: 2–3) Endowed with dynamic relationality and productivity, space-time generates narratives and demands continual narration, thereby constituting “a simultaneity of stories-so-far.” (Massey 2005: 9) In light of this conceptualization of space-time, Hong Kong cinema represents some of these stories-so-far that must be comprehended in simultaneity with other narratives of Hong Kong in its specific spatialities and temporalities.

Insofar as their emphasis on socio-historical relations is concerned, Massey’s space-time and Bakhtin’s chronotope share much in common, although chronotope as a theory of the novel may be better suited for a theory of film genre (as Law explains), while space-time as a concept of cultural geography is more enmeshed in real-life power geometries (as I contend elsewhere) (Zhang 2010: 1–7). The specificity of Hong Kong as a British colony defined by its “borrowed time” and “borrowed place” has exerted a profound impact on narratives and aesthetics in Hong Kong cinema (Abbas 1997: 106). The spatial relationality of Hong Kong to mainland China produced a distinct “China factor” and countless “border-crossing” stories on and off screen, while its temporal relationality occasioned a prolonged anxiety over 1997 and a refashioned genre of nostalgia cinema from the mid-1980s onward (HKIFF 1990; HKIFF 2000; Zhang 2002: 276–282). Allegorical configurations of space-time abounded in Hong Kong cinema before and after 1997. In its production of horror targeted at an inter-Asian audience in the new century, Applause Pictures chose an anachronistic depiction of Chinese mainlanders that would ironically, if not surprisingly, configure Hong Kong as a place of death and cannibalism, as seen in Lim’s reading of “Going Home” (Peter Chan, 2002) and “Dumplings” (Fruit Chan, 2004). Wong Kar-wai’s auteurist films such as *Chungking Express* (1994) direct attention to a different set of space-time that thrives

on the intimacy of globalized urban spatialities, temporalities, and subjectivities, as Biancorosso explains. Nonetheless, in Wong's *Ashes of Time* (1994), nostalgia stills creeps in, and a yearning for *jianghu* (literally, "rivers and lakes") as an alternative space-time is palpable in the characters' angsts of perpetual waiting.

Wong's intervention in the genres of urban cinema and martial arts films brings us to an earlier period in Hong Kong cinema, in which Cathay and Shaw Brothers – both funded by Singapore capital – entered a fierce competition in Hong Kong from the mid-1950s to the early 1960s, though pursuing drastically different configurations of space-time and narrative (Zhang 2004: 163–173). On the one hand, Cathay's investment in cosmopolitanism by flaunting urban modernity, youth culture, and Western styles – as in *Mambo Girl* (Yi Wen, 1957) and *June Bride* (Tang Huang, 1960) – was future-oriented and represented a departure from the previous genre of "singsong pictures" (*gechang pian*) that were self-indulgent in their nostalgia for old Shanghai, as in the Zhou Xuan vehicles like *Orioles Banished from the Flowers* (Fang Peilin, 1948) (Teo 1997: 29–30). On the other hand, Shaw Brothers preferred traditional narratives and appeared past-oriented in its production of ancient costume dramas, including popular "yellow-plum tunes" (*huangmeidiao*, a regional opera originated from Hubei and Anhui provinces) and martial arts films. Interestingly, as the genre broadly associated with Hong Kong cinema, martial arts films are rarely set in Hong Kong itself, as evident in Bruce Lee's globally influential films. Similarly, as the most iconic Hong Kong film company in the twentieth century, Shaw Brothers is hardly remembered for its narratives of space-time specific to Hong Kong. A dynamic of off-centeredness is integral to Hong Kong cinema.

Nostalgia/Geography

The divergence in narrative and aesthetics between Cathay and Shaw Brothers in the mid-1950s highlights Hong Kong cinema's preference for off-centeredness over centrality. Geographically, the local market alone has never been sufficient for Hong Kong cinema. That is why in his "stories-so-far" about Hong Kong cinema up to 1997, Stephen Teo starts with two historical chapters on "the Shanghai Hangover" and "Shanghai Redone." (Teo 1997: 3–39) More recently, Poshek Fu conceives Shaw Brothers as "diasporic cinema" committed nonetheless to projecting a vision of "China forever." (Fu 2008) Indeed, Hong Kong cinema from 1956 to 1979 (the former designating the arrival of Cathay and Shaw Brothers in Hong Kong while the latter marking the rise of the Hong Kong New Wave) is designated as "Chinese diasporic cinema." (Chu 2002: xix-xx, 22–41) All these stories confirm that Hong Kong cinema has survived and thrived in its translocal and polylocal operations and that it does not fit the national cinema paradigm (Zhang 2011: 17–25). Its longstanding connection with regional and international networks

has earned this characterization – “Hong Kong’s is the regional cinema par excellence.” (Bordwell 200: 61) After all, in the late 1930s, standard terms for films produced in Hong Kong foregrounded their geographic and linguistic specificities: neither “South China films” (*Hua’nan dianying*) nor “Cantonese films” (*Yueyu pian*) posited Hong Kong as the center (Han 2005: 57).

“Regional,” “translocal,” “diasporic” – these and other related terms point to a distinct orientation of off-centeredness in the geographic imagination of Hong Kong cinema. Robert Chi urges us to envision precisely such a different kind of center:

Rather than as a point from which things come or a point at which things arrive, we should think of a center as a point through which things pass. In terms of cinema, a center in this revised sense is not a place where films are made... but a place where things like tropes, genres, talent, technology, capital, production methods, and even management styles themselves pass through, recombining and metamorphosing in the process (Chi 2012: 89).

Chi’s revised vision of the center corroborates the recent theoretical reorientation of humanistic inquiries from roots to routes (i.e., from myths of origins to trajectories of travel and translation) (Clifford 1997). The rich resonance of the Chinese name for Hong Kong – Xianggang (literally “fragrant port”) – is unpacked in Rey Chow’s exegesis:

Etymologically, the word “port” illuminates all the aspects of Hong Kong’s “origins” that are suppressed... “Port” refers, of course, to Hong Kong’s status as an *entrepot*, an entrance point or *portal* to China and Asia... a vast emporium with a plenitude of *exports* and *imports*. More significantly, though, it refers to the *transporting* function... [through which] Hong Kong has fully established itself as a land of *opportunities*. If Hong Kong remains in the avant-garde of world city culture, it is because it makes *portability*... a fact of life (Chow 1998: 176).

Given its etymological richness, the “fragrant port” of Hong Kong must be understood as a world-class center that has facilitated flows of all kinds between different centers around the world, and the city has done it so successfully that it lacks a secure sense of centrality itself. The awareness of such a lack amidst all fantastic flows is presented in *Chungking Express*, an aesthetically appealing film that captures the logic of off-centeredness in Hong Kong cinema. This logic has resulted not only in an obligatory gesture toward elsewhere and elsewhen in Hong Kong cinema but also in a consistent tendency of nostalgia: perpetually off-centered, Hong Kong desires something that has always already escaped here and now, and nostalgia therefore has remained an effective and affective trope in Hong Kong cinema. Examined through the lens of such off-centeredness, it is significant that prevalent choices of historical periods for nostalgic investment in Hong Kong cinema of the 1980s–1990s are those steeped in urban modernity and cosmopolitanism, for instance Shanghai of the 1930s and Hong Kong of the 1950s–1960s.

Space-time configurations in nostalgia films require active involvement from both filmmakers and viewers. “Nostalgia is,” as Rey Chow observes of *Rouge* (Stanley Kwan, 1987), “most acutely felt not as an attempt to return to the past as such, but as an effect of temporal dislocation – of something having been displaced in time.” (Chow 1998: 147) Since the past as such is unattainable, temporal and spatial dislocations (elsewhen and elsewhere) provide the means of proactive remembrance and “sentimental fabulations.” (Chow 2007) Thus, formulated as a fluid process rather than a fixed goal, nostalgia is, in Abbas’ judgment, “not the return of past memory” but “the return of memory to the past” (Abbas 1997: 83).

In Law’s interpretation, the return of memory to the past occurs in the annual ritual of collectively watching New Year films in Hong Kong, which typically articulates the nostalgia for something presumably absent, endangered, or even lost – a comfy home, a happy family, a knowable community, a forgotten tradition. Nevertheless, at least outside the parameters of New Year films, remembrances of the past need not operate in a nostalgic fashion. In Lim’s analysis, allusions to traditional Chinese medicine (*Zhongyi*) in Hong Kong’s recent horror genre are translocal and transtemporal by definition, but not exclusively nostalgic in nature, perhaps not even overtly sentimental. Here, we should be reminded of “post-nostalgia” – a concept Vivian Lee has developed in the context of post-1997 Hong Kong cinema: “In essence, the post-nostalgic is not ‘anti-nostalgic,’ but implies a nuanced relatedness to the past as history/text/images; as such, the post-nostalgic can also be constructed as a form of *meta-(con)textual self-critique*.” (Lee 2009: 6) Discussed in Lim’s chapter, “Dumplings” represents exactly such a post-nostalgic self-critique, through which Hong Kong’s much celebrated neoliberal capitalism and mainland China’s peculiarly vital posthumous socialism are both interrogated.

Reception/Audience

Law interprets the genre of New Year films to be a ritualistic commemoration that offers a feast of nostalgia to the audience. For her, sharing valuable time with family and friends in the annual festive season would transform the movie-theater into a place where a “claustrophilic” festivity is consumed, affective pleasure attained, and a sense of solidarity affirmed. This interpretation raises further questions regarding the movie-theater’s openness in space-time configurations, changes in genre development, and variations in audience’s reception.

First, “claustrophilic” is but one way of describing the audience’s sentimental attachment to the movie theater, for rather than a feeling of confinement in darkness, the movie theater attracts the audience thanks to its promise of radical openness in space-time configurations. The silver screen projects seemingly endless scenarios of imaginative space-time through narratives and spectacles. As Zhang Zhen observes of the anarchic energy of martial arts films from 1920s Shanghai,

“the power of the cinematic mise-en-scène produced a virtual *Jianghu* space”—an imaginary parallel universe—and the movie screen offered urban audiences “a virtual trip to faraway landscapes where freedom can be attained and justice rectified.” (Zhang 2005: 242) Indeed, the capacity for open space-time is crucial to martial arts films, which represent one of traditional genres that make up the composite genre of New Year films in Law’s classification.

Second, driven by its dynamic of off-centeredness, Hong Kong cinema has seen a wider variety of genre recombination in its recent releases of New Year films, which have moved beyond action (Jackie Chan) and comedy (Stephen Chow) to include epic and tragedy. Arguably, the audience might not intend to “make merry on time” (Law’s title) with gruesome New Year releases such as *The Warlords* (Peter Chan, 2007), where thousands die in battlefields and the valiant hero (played by Jet Li) willingly faces assassination in submission to the imperial power. The similar trend of moving from light to heavy genres in New Year films has occurred in mainland China. Immensely popular with his New Year comedies of the late 1990s, Feng Xiaogang has increasingly turned to serious narratives from action (*A World Without Thieves*, 2004) to war (*Assembly*, 2007) and disaster films—restaging a devastating earthquake in *Aftershock* (2010) and a prolonged famine in *Back to 1942* (2012). To say the least, Feng’s repeated scenes of dead bodies are incompatible with the audience’s expectation of visual pleasure and feel-good festivity in conventional New Year films (Kong 2009: 147–67; Zhu 2010: 195–207).

Third, film receptions vary in accordance with the audience’s cultural and linguistic proficiency, in addition to geopolitical, historical, and other factors. Lai has coined the term “enigmatization” to describe the cinematic practice whereby local Cantonese-speaking audiences became a privileged hermeneutic community to appreciate insider references in nostalgia cinema of the 1980s–1990s (Lai 2001: 232). Similarly, Lim has discovered a bifurcated mode of address in Applause Pictures’ recent production of horror films: an inclusive gesture to consolidate pan-Asian, translocal audiences by recourse to their genre familiarity on the one hand, and on the other a more exclusive layer of appreciation for select insider audiences with competencies in Chinese culture and history. Furthermore, as if building on Lim’s discussion of allusionism (as defined by Noël Carroll) (Carroll 1982: 42), Biancorosso reveals a wider range of aesthetic and cognitive pleasures derived from the audience’s ability to identify Wong Kar-wai’s cinematic cues such as urban locales, musical citations, and star personae. All these cases point to different textual, intertextual, and contextual levels upon which audience’s reception may be anticipated, altered, and augmented.

Performance/Affect

Given various contingent factors in reception as mentioned above, it is unlikely that the annual ritual of watching New Year films would automatically lead to a singular affirmation of Chinese or Hong Kong identity. Law is correct in clarifying

that Chineseness as a cultural memory is actively imagined, shared, sustained – and, I would add, critiqued, negotiated, and reconstructed – through the ritualistic, collective commemoration occasioned by New Year films. After all, identity is performative, as Judith Butler asserts. And it is through performance that affect is generated, transmitted, and experienced.

Performance relies on repetition, and repetition normally enhances visibility. Here, I draw attention to disappearance and invisibility as an insight from performance studies that further illuminates our understanding of Hong Kong cinema. To quote Della Pollock's reading of Butler, "the ultimate trick of performance-as-repetition is to make itself disappear into the appearance of history as 'given.'" (Pollock 2006: 4) Repetition, in other words, can make performance disappear and becomes invisible. This performative sense of disappearance is dovetailed with Abbas's characterization of Hong Kong culture in general and Hong Kong cinema in particular. More specifically, the Hong Kong New Wave, as represented by Wong Kar-wai and Stanley Kwan, articulates the urgency of *déjà disparu* – "the feeling that what is new and unique about the situation is always already gone." (Abbas 1997: 25) For Abbas, the culture of disappearance is even more apparent in the realm of architecture, where Hong Kong turns out to be "a peculiar kind of 'invisible city'—it appears in the moment of disappearance (first sense), and it disappears in appearance/representation (second sense)." (Abbas 1997: 73) What is otherwise unique about Hong Kong disappears through "reverse hallucination," which Abbas defines as "not seeing what is there," or through "all those nondescript commercial and residential blocks that seem to replicate themselves endlessly" (Abbas 1997: 6, 82).

Not surprisingly, the ghost film is a perfect vehicle for articulating disappearance and invisibility. In their phantom but recurrent appearances, ghosts are both there and not there, and their intermittent visibility induces horror precisely due to their otherwise invisibility in popular belief. The irony of not seeing what is there is presented in startling details in "Going Home" because, on screen, the audience witnesses the miracle cures of cancer patients – who become ghosts or at least ghostly because of their ability to traverse between the realms of life and death – by traditional Chinese medicine, whereas most characters in the film fail to see them. The repeated playing of the patients' videotaped instructions and testimonies intensifies horror as a particular type of affect.

Disappearance and invisibility can produce other types of affect as well. Biancorosso's analysis of Wong Kar-wai substantiates a case of invisibility in star performance, much to the delight of those observant viewers who are "in-the-know." When Faye Wong cameos with a giant cuddly toy in the first half of *Chungking Express*, she is as yet unknown and out of place, but extradiegetically, she is immediately recognizable as Faye Wong to her film and music fans. Wong's trick here is not so much star-gazing as star-spotting, and its performative nature is sustained by the star's cameos of herself in the second half of the film: as "Faye" a.k.a. Faye, as a fictional Faye played by the real-life star named Faye.

What Biancorosso calls “a form of embodied punning” – which duplicates the punning on building names (“Chungking Mansion” in Tsim Sha Tsui and “California Tower” in Lan Kwai Fong, the latter nonexistent now and hence invisible in the cityscape) – reminds us of other kinds of cinematic “performance” invisible to non-observant viewers but integral to narrative and aesthetics.

Lai’s work on diary films in independent documentary draws our attention to yet another realm of invisibility: everyday practices of locality, memory, and identity that have regularly disappeared into the political and commercial mainstream mediascape. For me, Lai’s examples of diary films are performative in that they deliberately resist their invisibility in history and, to quote Lai, “dismiss monumental values by highlighting what is trivial, absurd, accidental, and incomprehensible.” The invisibility of the everyday is captured by Lo Kwai-cheung’s statement, “1997 is like a belly button,” from a theater piece he produced in 1997, *Desires of the Belly Button*. Lo’s performative juxtaposition of 1997 and the belly button foregrounds the sheer incompatibility of monumental history and everyday triviality, subtly interrogating visibility, invisibility, and all those values we are taught to attribute to them respectively. It is by means of making visible the otherwise invisible that diary films function as revisionist, alternative historiography.

The performative rendition of everyday practices is not limited to independent documentary in Hong Kong. For instance, Ann Hui’s post-1997 fiction films have consistently intervened in the everyday realm. If *Ordinary Heroes* (1999) still betrays a nostalgic and theatrical orientation in her interrogation of public history and private memory, *The Way We Are* (2008) demonstrates her solid grounding in specific locality (Tin Shui Wai), her confidence in non-star performance and non-melodramatic narrative, and her effective use of documentary methods to produce and transmit affect (Szeto 2011: 51–66).

Conclusion

I have delineated the dynamics of off-centeredness in Hong Kong cinema in my commentary on its narrative and aesthetics. This dynamics help us comprehend the tendency toward elsewhere and elsewhen in Hong Kong’s cinematic “stories-so-far,” which frequently destabilize claims to centrality and evoke alternative perspectives instead. The dynamics of off-centeredness explains Hong Kong cinema’s consistent preference for mixed genres, marginal geographies, translocal audiences, unsettling affect, and ambivalent space-time, and all these have contributed to the consolidation of Hong Kong cinema’s distinctive place in world cinema.

Notes

- 1 I prefer “New Year films” to Lau’s “Chinese New Year films” because the release window for this composite “genre” – a group of films classifiable under other genres such as action and comedy – often starts in late December.

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Part VI

Screen Histories and Documentary Practices

The Lightness of History

Screening the Past in Hong Kong Cinema

Vivian P.Y. Lee

History in Hong Kong cinema takes a myriad forms: from the recovery of marginal voices in docudramas and national allegory in martial arts films to postmodernist reconfigurations of temporality and affect and playful citations of period codes, the local cinema offers a rich repertoire of screen histories, or screen memories, for an investigation into the popular historical imagination, where “history” refers as much to the material reality of the past as to the experience of images from earlier times. The popular “recycling” of the past may well be a symptom of postmodernist culture: Fredric Jameson speaks of the “depthlessness” of mainstream nostalgia films and their potential to dehistoricize the past (Jameson 1998: 1–12). While Jameson’s critique of the American culture industry has global resonances, cinema remains a powerful means for the articulation and contestation of individual and collective memories. An examination of screen histories has to attend to the fluid and idiosyncratic quality of the cinematic medium, and inevitably brings forth the question of authenticity of the image and its relationship to the viewer’s affective and imaginative (dis)connections with the past, especially when memory is understood as “a process of becoming” subject to revision and alteration through contact with other memories, such as mediated memories in films and other “moving image texts” (McNeill 2010).

This chapter is concerned with Hong Kong’s screen memories as a form of “moving-image text.” The discussion is situated in the context of the city’s (post)colonial condition and the compressed cultural space where local history disappears into fragments of memories, anecdotes, sentiments, and images, and reappears in popular cultural texts. Instead of a loss of history, the “burden of history” is most disturbing when it becomes *light*, when it becomes slippery,

fragmented, and hard to grasp. History in Hong Kong cinema therefore can be construed as a history of lightness, understood in the dual sense of “making light of” and “grappling with lightness.” The following discussion locates the city’s historical lightness in films made in a variety of styles and genres. Their diversity notwithstanding, these films demonstrate a close affiliation to the image culture of earlier decades, to the extent that past images and conventions become both the medium and the substance of the filmic representation. My analysis will consider the connection between screen memory and the visual codes and strategies that make it “visible,” and how this visibility gains weight as it engages with the “lightness” of its subject matter.

The Burden of History

History is anything but light in the Chinese experience. Traditionally, history commanded significant epistemological authority as one of the three branches of knowledge (literature, history, and philosophy). Common expressions such as “*lishi de zhongdan*” (the burden of history) and “*lishi de chenzhong*” (the heavy weight of history) encapsulate the importance of *shi* in the Chinese cultural psyche.¹ The burden of history is also felt in the works of Chinese filmmakers. China’s humiliating defeats by foreign invaders have been the substance of countless war movies, from portrayals of the Opium Wars in *Lin Zexu* (Zheng Junli, 1959) and *Opium War* (Xie Jin, 1997) to more complex reflections on violence and war trauma in *Devils on the Doorstep* (Jiang Wen, 1990) and *City of Life and Death* (Lu Chuan, 2009). This is yet to take into account the vibrant cinematic reflections on China’s recent and distant past concurrent with the “cultural self-reflection” movement in the 1980s, followed by the urban cinema of independent and underground filmmakers who turn their eyes on urban alienation and the spiritual vacuum underneath the façade of economic progress in the post-Tian’anmen era. The younger filmmakers’ vision of the “here and now” is infused with a sense of incredulity toward official history. Screen memories of a more personal nature, for example Lou Ye’s *Summer Palace* (2006), Huo Jianqi’s *Postmen in the Mountains* (1999), Jiang Wen’s *In the Heat of the Sun* (1994), Lu Xuechang’s *The Making of Steel* (1995), self-consciously intervene in the historical discourse of the state.

Chinese cinema, it seems, is ineluctably entwined with the narrative of the nation even at a time when economic globalization and transnational capital seem to have fostered a “post-national” world view.² It is at this juncture that the diverging paths of Hong Kong’s screen memories contribute to critical reflection on the nature of cinematic remembrance and its nuanced articulations of self, cultural, and national identities. Still, it must be acknowledged that “China” has had a nuanced presence in Hong Kong cinema: the “imaginary China” in the *wuxia* films of the 1960s/1970s was succeeded by Tsui Hark’s fantasy-inflected national allegories,

the modern *jianghu* (*wuxai* mythic world) in John Woo's "crisis cinema" (Tony Williams 1997), and Johnnie To's postmodern neo-noir gangland. Parallel to the action auteurs are a group of socially committed directors such as Ann Hui, Allen Fong, Yim Ho, and Fruit Chan, whose work reinvigorated the realist tradition with aesthetic refinement and contemporary relevance. While films such as *Song of the Exile* (Ann Hui, 1990), *Father and Son* (Allen Fong, 1982), *Homecoming* (Yim Ho, 1984), and *Little Cheung* (Fruit Chan, 1999) are not necessarily "history films," individual acts of remembrance are cast against the larger fabric of collective memory. Quite apart from the preoccupation with the nation, Hong Kong's screen memories tend to be more fragmented and diffused. Part of the reason is the problematic identification with the "nation" against the complex histories of colonialism and China's nation-building since the late nineteenth-century. Another contributing factor is the "laissez faire" filmmaking environment where the market reigns supreme. Screen memories, to a large extent, reflect this condition of in-betweenness and fragmentation. In the popular cinematic imagination, history is as much about "what happened" as it is about stylistic choices, so much so that sometimes "style" becomes a means and a subject of historical representation.

Despite the proliferation of local screen memories, the "Hong Kong story" remains "difficult to tell" (Lui 2003: 206–218), and when such an attempt is made, more questions are asked than answered. The problem of narration has to do with the systemic suppression of a local cultural consciousness (Turner 2003) independent of the colonial-capitalist ideology of "progress" and the utilitarian pursuit of modernity. Economic growth and rising living standards since the late 1960s, says Matthew Turner, had led to the conflation of "identity" with a modern "way of life":

The problem of self-image in a territory that will shortly cease to exist in its present form, of British "subjects" without nationality, the "compatriots" of a China which most have chosen to leave, seems to bring us back to earlier images of a dislocated, alienated society, a population of "residents and other persons" without an unique identity to protect, merely a capitalistic "way of life" to maintain. Such an image is a convenient expedient used to justify the political decision of Britain and China not to allow the Hong Kong people to speak for themselves (Turner 2003: 48).

Critical literature on Hong Kong politics and culture has shown how the two realms are entwined in everyday life. Since the change of sovereignty in 1997, this entwinement has intensified and further complicated the attempt to conceptualize the "local" in the postcolonial present. Turner concludes his article with the conjecture that "lifestyle" might well be conceived as a site of resistance where a local cultural consciousness would emerge in the circumscribed sphere of identity politics (Turner 2003: 50). Thomas Wong, writing for the same volume, ponders with less reassurance:

the Hong Kong consciousness is a contested terrain, with the powerful trying to impose narratives, and the powerless responding with mocking cynicism (Wong 2003: 247).

In a highly compressed political and cultural environment where “culture” and “identity” are collapsed into “lifestyle,” these questions are especially illuminating, for they point toward the elusiveness of the city as a historical subject shrouded in official myths and political clichés, such as “the Hong Kong success story” endorsed by both the British and Chinese governments.³ These dilemmas are materially embedded in the spatial design of what Janet Ng (2009) calls the “paradigm city,” where “the state inculcates a particular civic aesthetic among Hong Kong’s population that corresponds to the capitalist as well as nationalist ideologies” (Ng 2009: 3). Ng’s critique of the city’s rigorously regulated institutional spaces reveals an underlying logic of physical and cognitive control that limits agency and manipulate users’ consciousness. We shall see that, in attempting to tell the “Hong Kong story,” filmmakers find themselves engrossed in the same ideological cul-de-sac. In response, they resort to a variety of strategies to circumscribe the inherent inadequacies of this compromised position vis-à-vis the larger contexts of the colonial past and the postcolonial present.

Grappling with Lightness: Peripheral Visions

To Zygmunt Bauman (2000), “lightness” exemplifies the experience of modernity, which has been a process of “liquefaction,” of making everything light, mobile, and shapeless. Human subjectivity and agency, too, become “fluid” in the ever-increasing velocity of technology (Bauman 2000: 9–10). Bauman’s critique does not directly deal with cinema and memory, but his idea of modernity as “liquefaction” helps to illuminate the condition of lightness in screen memories, for lightness is construed as both a predicament, something like an imposed condition, and a critical sensitivity that seeks to grapple with this predicament.⁴ This argument can be adapted, with some qualification, to a study of screen memories in (post) colonial Hong Kong as a reaction to its historical lightness: after one and a half centuries of British rule, its experience of modernity has been a function of the colonial ideology that defined its public governance and cultural politics. In Hong Kong, “liquefaction” results from a mechanism of peripheralization, where local agency obtains carefully monitored autonomy in public affairs and economic-political participation under colonial rule. It is what Law Wing-sang (2009) calls “collaborative colonialism”: it is a function of the so-called “indirect rule,” which operated by co-opting local elites to conduct affairs concerning the locals to ensure the stability of British rule while maintaining a façade of “freedom and liberty” within the realm of the *laissez faire* economy. Relegated to the periphery, the locals enjoyed a limited degree of reciprocity in practical transactions. The quiescent colonial subject therefore could share the dividends of economic prosperity as long as they were kept at a distance from things that truly mattered, such as democracy, social equality, and voting rights after 1997. This schizophrenic split between

economic progress and systemic political peripheralization has not disappeared since the change of sovereignty: it has been internalized and reinvented by the new HKSAR government under “one country, two systems.”

Not that the locals are forbidden to look after their own affairs, but they are systemically frustrated when they want to do it differently, that is, as a counter-hegemonic *majority*. Turner’s “lifestyle-as-identity” thus finds a nuanced echo in Ackbar Abbas’s note on decadence:

Historical imagination... gets replaced by speculation on the property or stock markets, or by an obsession with fashion or consumerism. If you cannot choose your political leaders, at least you can choose your own clothes (Abbas 1997: 5).

Or images. Decadence, too, is a symptom of lightness: it is a gesture of irrelevance and irreverence, the “cult of the ephemeral” (Abbas 1997: 9) – where self-determination has been overruled.

A profitable way to start a discussion on irrelevance/irreverence is to briefly revisit the culture of “*mo lei tau*,” a term originally used to describe the “nonsense” film style of Stephen Chow, Hong Kong’s “King of Comedy.” Chow’s status as an iconic screen comedian hinges upon a clever manipulation of the “local” and the means through which he communicates his “local identity” to a broadening base of regional and international audiences. His irreverent appropriation of the conventions, acting style, personas, and linguistic register of Cantonese films from the 1950s to the 1970s combines both nostalgia and a no-holds-barred transgressive spirit that is central to his popular appeal. Chow’s later endeavors, for instance *Shaolin Soccer* (2001) and *Kung Fu Hustle* (2004), have played down the context-specific in-jokes, and citations from Bruce Lee and the *kung fu* film conventions are tactfully honed in a film narrative that exploits the intertextual knowledge of film audiences in a more transnational context. Arguably, Chow’s comedy exhibits a postmodernist hybridity and playfulness that routinely turns its own nostalgia into a target of appropriation and parody. This said, however, Chow’s affective connection to the visual culture of the past runs deeper than a postmodernist fascination with surfaces, for his films also pays homage to popular martial arts heroes. This kind of historical inscription captures the absurdity of humanity that Chow and his screen fellows personify. It is also a function of Chow’s idiosyncratic rewriting of Hong Kong’s cinematic history, in which the “local” is subject to contending ideological and cultural constructions. In Chow’s cinema, the local is a transmutation of hybrid sources: from the Cantonese classics of Ng Chor-fan (see below) and Bruce Lee to James Bond, Walt Disney cartoons, Japanese manga and, closer to home, Jin Yong’s martial arts novels. The ease with which Chow, a self-made director with no formal film school training, can effectively exploit the chemistry between local and foreign sources with little regard to authenticity, or even intellectual property, says volumes about Hong Kong’s cultural history, if not the narration of this history, and why the

local is always elusive. Yet, underlying all this “nonsense” is a fascination with the images of the past, and filmmaking can be seen as the director’s means to engage in a dialogue with those images that have left an indelible mark on the budding artistic consciousness of his childhood self. Instead of history per se, Chow is more interested in a visual “reinhabitation” of a *mediated* past – a reinvention of “style” through displacement and recontextualization.

Chow is not alone among his contemporaries in revisiting old styles and conventions. Jeffrey Lau’s 92 *Legendary La Rose Noire* (1992) kicked off a new cycle of nostalgia films in the 1990s. Encouraged by the critical and box-office success of this film, Lau went on to make *Rose, Rose, I Love You* (1993) and *Black Rose II* (1997). The prototype, *The Black Rose* (Chor Yuen, 1965), is a popular spy-action film with an all-star cast: Nam Hung and Connie Chan Po-chu play the Black Roses, and Patrick Tse Yin the young detective who eventually falls in love with Connie Chan’s character.⁵ What makes *La Rose Noire* an interesting example of the nostalgia film cycle is that, its playful engagements with the original aside, the film constructs explicit analogies to the star culture of the period, casting Tony Leung Kar-fai in the role of the detective whose prototype is *not* Patrick Tse, but another 1960s teenage heartthrob Lui Kei, Connie Chan’s sweetheart on and off screen. In Lau’s rendition, the younger Black Rose is played by another 1960s superstar, Fung Bo-bo, who began acting as a child actor in black-and-white movies in the 1950s. An advanced amnesiac, she regresses into her childhood self and, in an ingenious character pun, turns into a parody of herself – Fung Bo-bo the child actor. The film’s main action amounts to a time travel in disguise, and the “adventure” of the younger characters in the mysterious mansion of the Roses is dotted with hilarious moments, including a dangerous passage through a dungeon equipped with motion-sensing weapons, a typical device in 1950s Cantonese martial arts films. Other nostalgic adornments include several song-and-dance numbers reminiscent of the *qingchun gewupian* (youth musical) of the period. The archaic visual and character design is further enhanced by a sound track reminiscent of 1950s martial arts and detective genre films.

In 1993, Peter Chan and Li Chi-ngai released *He Ain’t Heavy, He’s My Father*. In this film, time travel is a plot device that motivates the reconciliation between father and son, past and present. The film also casts Tony Leung Kar-fai as the central character whose prototype is another Cantonese cinema legend, Ng Chor-fan, who is best-known for playing fatherly characters embracing the Confucian virtues of loyalty, generosity, and righteousness. (Ng was associated with the left-wing cinema in the 1940s and 1950s. He plays the philanthropic principal of an orphanage in *The Kid* [Feng Feng, 1950], which showcases Bruce Lee as an orphan controlled by a group of petty criminals.) The protagonist Chor Fan (Tony Leung Kar-fai) is Ng’s incarnation, who lives by the motto “all for the greater good” (*ren ren wei wo, wo wei ren ren*). The film’s Chinese title directly borrows from a 1960s hit, *The Odd Couple* (*Nanxiong nandi*) (Chun Kim, 1960), but the story goes much deeper into the ethos of the working class film in the 1950s.

Local audiences familiar with black-and-white Cantonese films – or even their modern parodies, whether in the theater or on television – can immediately recognize the source: the “social problem” films of Ng Chor-fan’s generation. More than coincidentally, this outdated teaching finds a new spokesperson in the character of Old Kong, the diehard leftist, in a more recent “reunification” film, *Mr. Cinema* (Samson Chiu Leung-chun, 2007, discussed below).

In reinventing a bygone era of communal bonding and class solidarity, the directors throw in abundant references not so much to the historical reality of the time but to its film culture. Like *La Rose Noire*, *He Ain’t Heavy* displays a hotchpotch of generic allusions, name/character puns, and playful citations of memorable images from the film culture of the 1950s and 1960s. This kind of intertextuality is a recurrent feature of the nostalgia films since the 1990s. The extensive use of intertextual play is no doubt a feature of postmodernism, but this alone does not adequately explain the prevalence of this indulgence in a wide range of films and genres. Arguably, the films are more concerned with recreating/reinhabiting the *cinematic* time-space in order to rediscover its contemporary relevance and significance: what the present generation has casually dismissed as ridiculous and old-fashioned is precisely the cultural memory being recalled and reclaimed. What does this “simulacrum of a simulacrum” say about the relationship between nostalgia and the historical experience/imagination of the city? To what extent is it a response to the anxiety over loss of memory and identity during, and after, the political transition? The “reconfiguration of the idols of the 1950s and 1960s cinema,” says Natalia Chan (2000), “signifies the collective consciousness and the social memory of the people of Hong Kong. It is a nostalgia that points to the introspection of the past, the anxiety of the present, and the uncertainty of the future,” one that “awakens the sense of social belonging as well as the search for cultural identity” (Chan 2000: 269).

This understanding of nostalgia’s social value seems to have guided the Hong Kong Film Archive’s publication projects. An example of immediate interest is the volume *The Glamorous Modernity of Kong Ngee* (2006). In his chapter on the film culture of the 1950s and 1960s, Yung Sai-sing, uses “imagined modernity” to refer to the Kong Ngee studio’s urban films. At a time when the local film scene was dominated by the glamorous Mandarin features of the Shaw Brothers and MP&GI, Kong Ngee was able to find inroads into the young audience market with its Cantonese productions. Kong Ngee was also the home base of teen idols Connie Chan, Lui Kei, Patrick Tse, Nam Hung, and Linda Kar Ling. From the romantic comedy and “odd couple” genre to the noir-inflected spy movies, Yung delineates how Kong Ngee’s urban cinema was a major purveyor of the *haute couture* and urban lifestyle of the time that many ordinary folks could not yet afford. According to the editor, Kong Ngee’s films are distinguished by their “urban touch” and a “distinctively middle class flavor [that] made its mark on Hong Kong cinema” (Wong 2006: 16–18). To Yung, the “Kong Ngee style” is “part and parcel of a middle-class *fantasy* promised by a flourishing economy” (Yung 2006: 28, added emphasis).

The lure of the “middle-class fantasy,” it seems, is also central to the nostalgic imagination of the present, which embraces this “fantasy” as a collective historical experience. Rather than pursuing verisimilitude, the nostalgia films of the 1990s articulate the past–present relationship in a filmic medium that relies on pastiche, theatricality, and a seemingly ahistorical and decadent indulgence in pre-existing codes, themes, and images. Hoesterey’s study of pastiche argues that, from “post-modern pastiche” to “a dialogical mode... of cultural production,” cinematic nostalgia can be deployed as a self-reflexive mode of historical representation (Hoesterey 2001: x). In the films noted above, the invocation of symbolic signs of “the good old days” invites further reflection on the “conditions of possibility” that have shaped the city’s encounter with modernity (be it late-imperial British or twenty-first-century Chinese) and the popular imagination of/reaction to this encounter.

This mode of cinematic history-writing, however, cannot easily extract itself from the clichéd representations of Hong Kong as a modern city of humble origins, and one that revels in an “imagined modernity” of lifestyle and media products where a more critical intervention into the fissures and disjunctions of this brand of modernity is needed. Given that Hong Kong’s experience of the modern is entwined with the history of colonialism, and that the postcolonial decade has seen not the end but a mutation of the city’s peripherality from “collaborative colonialism” to what I would call the “motherland dependency syndrome,” cultural memory, too, has to negotiate with not one but multiple hegemonic discourses. The local’s openness to multiple inflections may obscure the critical potential of the concept itself. It is in this light that we now turn to a different set of images in Wong Kar-wai’s films, in which lightness defines a condition of being that is both unbearable and desirable at the same time. The obsession with surfaces, sometimes, is more complex than it seems.

Imagined Modernity Re-considered: Wong Kar-wai’s 1960s

Needless to say, Wong Kar-wai’s cinematic journeys into the 1960s are made on multiple inflections. Both Stephen Teo (2005: 5–8, 13) and Ackbar Abbas (1997: 49–50) have commented on the influence of popular film genres and TV production on Wong’s work. Wong’s films also draw upon motifs and quotations from a broad geocultural spectrum of literary, musical, and visual artworks. As Hong Kong’s homegrown auteur, Wong speaks to the peculiar lineage of the “local” culture and its perplexing historical anchorage. It might sound far-fetched to juxtapose the intertextual density of Wong’s films with those of Stephen Chow’s, but it is in their glaring differences that one discovers important connections between intertextuality and Hong Kong’s screen memories. My concern here is less about which sources/texts are referenced than the density and self-reflexivity of intertextual

referencing, and questions about effect and purpose. Here I would like to focus on his self-reflexive engagement with the “imagined modernity” of the urban cinema of the 1960s and the kind of “imagined heritage” that emerges from his deconstructive reworking of the themes and motifs of the past. The notion of “heritage” is invoked here not in the ordinary sense of consensual history but as a provocation: Wong’s films intensify the viewer’s nostalgic identification with images and objects from the past to such an extent that “pastness” becomes an effect of fabrication, that is, an interactive performance between viewer and camera.

It must be noted that Wong’s 1960s is constructed from a plethora of visual, audio, and textual codes from that era, and not all of them are “indigenous” in a strict sense: *Days of Being Wild* (*Ah Fei zhengzhuan*) (1990) borrows both the title and the “look” (including characters, set design and mood) of the voguish, James Dean-style young rebel (“*ah fei*” in Cantonese) film and subsequently absorbed into the local *ah fei* genre; both *In the Mood for Love* (2000) and *2046* (2004) draw upon the romantic melodrama in the *wenyi* tradition of the 1950s and 1960s (Teo, 2005: 3), while *2046* features science fiction elements in its metafictional frame. The narrative structure, as Teo notes, betrays the stylistic influence of Latin American literature, the work of Manuel Puig in particular (Teo, 2005: 4–5), although the explicit literary references are drawn from Hong Kong writer Liu Yichang’s *The Drunkard* (*Jiu tu*) and *Intersections* (*Dui Dao*). Wong’s directorial imprint is unmistakable throughout the trilogy: in addition to resonances in mood, characterization, and motifs, there is also a sense of thematic progression that links Lesley Cheung’s Yuddie (the young rebel) to his two successors, Chow Mo-wan (Tony Leung Chiu-wai) the reticent and reserved lover in *Mood*, who subsequently evolved into Chow Mo-wan the dandy and womanizer in *2046*, the same man and yet a different persona after the heartbreaking romance with So Lai-chen (Maggie Cheung) in *Mood*. Upon closer examination, the three films exhibit a circularity more intriguing than a linear progression. The later Chow Mo-wan in *2046* looks like a more mature self of Yuddie and the nameless young dandy (also played by Tony Leung Chiu-wai) whose role is confined to the final scene in *Days of Being Wild*, while the Chow Mo-wan in *Mood* occupies a “middle ground” that he himself later abandons.

What eventually brings these characters together is a self-denying impulse that seems to contradict their apparent self-indulgence: Yuddie is unable to commit to any serious relationship because of his oedipal obsession with the “mother” (which is further split into his adopted and biological mothers). Chow Mo-wan in *Mood* is consumed by his passion for another forbidden target, So Lai-chen, a married woman who finds consolation in Chow’s company when they discover (and later playact) the affair between their spouses. Rejected by his biological mother in the Philippines, Yuddie gets himself into a brawl with the local gangsters and dies of a serious injury on a train. Chow, in a more sober manner, chooses to bury his secret in a tree hole on a visit to the Angkor Wat. In a rhythmically composed scene, Chow’s memories – not to be overheard by the audience – are absorbed into the

ruins of Angkor. To both Yuddie and Chow, time has frozen at the moment of loss: Yuddie insists on the precise date, hour, and minute when he meets So Lai-chen (also played by Maggie Cheung) for the first time, while Chow holds on to an unspeakable secret buried in timeless ruins. Interestingly, despite Yuddie's and Chow's pretention to forget, time past remains a spectral presence in the film narrative, refusing to be buried in time or silenced by death: Yuddie finds an incarnate in the nameless young dandy in the enigmatic ending shot, while Chow turns into a mature version of Yuddie (and his former self) in 2046, no less haunted by memories of "So Lai-chen," a name and a face that seem to resist change, and time, throughout the trilogy.⁶ As the trilogy develops, "So Lai-chen" splits and multiplies further in 2046, respectively played by Gong Li (a femme fatale character), Maggie Cheung (the conflicted woman from *Mood*), and Maggie Cheung in a cameo shot of a cyborg on the express train to the imaginary "2046," a destination in Chow Mo-wan's science fiction where one can recover past memories.

Character overlap creates thematic and narrative interreferentiality, hence layers of possible meaning. Instead of a straightforward linear progression, the films are connected through a constellation of visual, textual, and sound motifs that gives rise to the structural circularity mentioned above. Compared to the nostalgia films discussed above, Wong's nostalgic universe exhibits a more complex intertextuality that goes beyond adapting and embracing old forms. The extensive use of intertextual references from local and foreign sources is complemented by a more intense circulation of motifs and images *within* the trilogy. Instead of creating convenient knock-offs, intertextual density, or intertextual intensity in Wong's case, is a vehicle for philosophical reflection on time and history, so much so that the nostalgic becomes a means and a subject of critique. As it were, Wong's nostalgic reconstruction of the past is less referential than self-referential, in the sense that the 1960s emerges as a highly distilled image of *images*, thus amounting to a form of nostalgic (self-)parody. This understanding of nostalgia encourages a more complex reading of Wong's films not as "nostalgia films" per se, hence a vehicle of desire, but a self-conscious engagement with nostalgia as *both* text and desire.⁷ This is most obvious in Wong's meticulous attention to the "look" of the films: *Days of Being Wild* visually recalls the youth culture of the 1960s, especially the *ah fei* figure in popular cinema and music, which in turn is a translation of American pop culture. The extravagant display of the female body draped in body-hugging cheongsams and "*sam fu*" (white top and black pants, standard uniform for domestic servants) in *Mood* and 2046, on the other hand, is a hyperbolic representation of conventional dress codes that were slowly going *out* of fashion toward the late 1960s to give way to Western-style fashion apropos to Hong Kong's emerging modern outlook.⁸

Visually, the exquisitely tailored cheongsams and other "period objects" – cramped interior spaces, old-style cafes, streetlamps, taxi-cabs, the songs of Nat King Cole and Zhou Xuan, and a profusion of personal accessories – create a sensory overload, which is further magnified by the frequent use of close-ups and medium

close-ups. The cinematography also favors skewed camera angles to draw attention to the presence of the peeping/eavesdropping camera. By obstructing the viewer's gaze, the camera intensifies and frustrates the viewer's desire to see what should be there but remains "unseen." In *2046*, visual imbalance is more pronounced. The camera frequently violates eye-line matches and the conventional shot-reverse-shot composition. A shot may show characters in the extreme left or right, speaking to someone out of field, followed by a cut to reveal a reversed spatial orientation. Wong's camera not only announces its presence in, but also its interference with, the process of signification: the 1960s as historical reality is overtaken by the 1960s as artifice, and artifice, in turn, becomes the ultimate "signified" in the films.

When taken as a whole, the trilogy might be Wong's personal chronicle of the "most memorable images" of the decade, if not the director's tribute to the image culture of the 1960s. But one is prompted to ask: several decades later, what is the relevance of the imagined modernity of the 1960s to the arguably postmodern present? What common threads exist between the young rebel in *Days of Being Wild* and the *wenyi*-style lovers in *Mood* and *2046*? All three films have been interpreted as allegories of Hong Kong's colonial past and its anxieties over the city's future. No doubt Wong's obsession with material signs of the past bespeaks an intense nostalgia for lost time (Teo 2005: 119; Luo 2004: 132). The visual techniques noted above also suggest that the filmic image is carefully choreographed to create a tantalizing spectacle of the decade. What the films offer, therefore, is less a realistic representation than an *affective* recollection of iconic images of a bygone era. While nostalgic art generally relies on artifice to create an idealized version of the past, Wong's use of artifice – close-ups, skewed perspectives, visual imbalance, and violation of conventional shot compositions – has a denaturalizing effect that turns nostalgia, and the nostalgic persona engrossed in it, into a subject of inquiry. From *Days of Being Wild* to *In the Mood for Love* and *2046*, Wong's camera relentlessly traces the characters' movement through densely decorated interiors filled by everyday objects, so much so that the characters, with their meticulous make-up and period costumes, become embedded in the material, antiquated filmic universe, an imaginative space transformed before our eyes into a *figure* of history – the past *in performance*. McNeill (2010) has pointed out how film, as "artificial memory," plays a crucial part in the construction of shared social memory in the modern world (McNeill 2010: 31). This interactive formation of cultural memory is at the centre of the nostalgic image in Wong's films: instead of claiming authenticity, the stylized topography of the 1960s is a highly mediated form of "artificial memory" that speaks more to the *act* of recollection of past images in the present than the past *as it was*. The extravagantly coded screen memory of the 1960s, therefore, is an interrogation of the consciousness of the present: the sense of loss and bereavement that haunts the films' nostalgic personas takes allegory one step further by questioning the authenticity of the "lost object" of nostalgia itself, that is, Hong Kong's "younger self" five decades back. The

glamour, decadence, and romantic passion that funnel through the camera lenses, it follows, are the work of affect in the present.

Wong's way of "looking back" is both constructive and deconstructive in the sense that memory of the past is always a process of construction in the present, hence the "presentness" of time past at the moment of its recall. This leads us back to our earlier question about cinema and "imagined heritage," a question that cuts through the films discussed in this chapter. While the discourse of heritage (as consensual history) has been held suspect due to its institutional affiliation, the concept of heritage has been theorized as a complex representation of contending cultural, social, and political interests of the present. This understanding of heritage opens the field to contending interpretations and (de)constructions of heritage that challenge dominant discourses of identity and history. Cinema, as well as television and other digital media, has become a "theatre of memory" where "popular history" gains precedence over traditional forms of historiography (Samuel 1994: 3–17). If, as Stuart Hall suggests, heritage as representation should be opened up to include the "heritageless" such as the work of minority artists in the West (Hall 2007: 93–98), the "imagined modernity" in the urban cinema of the 1960s has to be seen within the complex history of British colonialism in Hong Kong and the city's truncated relationship with mainland China since 1949, if not for the simple reason that Hong Kong's "modernity" has always existed in a doubly negotiated form.

Wong's tribute to the 1960s complicates the route of memory and its referent by insisting on the artificiality of this "lived history" whose materiality depends on its being "virtual," that is, a modern experience of images that may or may not be materially concrete, but nonetheless remains an integral part of the popular imagination. This, perhaps, is the clue to Hong Kong's cultural memory – a memory of what has been *imaged* as real. If, following Stuart Hall, heritage is the work of representation, Wong's films, being "representations of representations," have translated Hong Kong's "imagined modernity" into a virtual archive of "imagined heritage." Its virtuality is a form of lightness that Wong tries to capture and comes to terms with: the passage of time, hence the vulnerability and futility of human agency in the process, is communicated through the mesmerizing imagery of the Angkor ruins, a timeless presence brought into being by the wreckage of time. A seeming reversal occurs in Chow Mo-wan's science fiction, "2046," which promises the recovery of memory in a "future" that defies the imagination: it is a destination that no one has ever returned from. Symbolically, "2046" is a pun on Hong Kong's political future – the timeframe "1997– 2007" that promises Hong Kong's lifestyle "will remain unchanged for fifty years" (*wushi nian bubian* 五十年不變, a famous dictum of ex-PRC Chairman Deng Xiaoping when referring to Chinese policy toward Hong Kong after 1997). Importantly, Deng's dictum refers, once again, to lifestyle: "horse-racing and dancing as usual" (*ma zhao pao, wu zhao tiao* 馬照跑, 舞照跳), rather than the more pressing concerns such as human rights and democracy. In this sense "no change" reveals an inhibitive logic of

counter-progress under the guise of a political promise. Once again we are reminded of the distortions and deprivations in the city's historical encounter with modernity – a top-down, watered-down, product of colonial or state power. Hong Kong's historical lightness – its fragmented discourse of identity and the systemic denial of political agency – is behind Wong's political pun.⁹

Taken as a whole, the trilogy is less about promises than betrayals and forgetfulness: if Yuddie is a metaphor for Hong Kong's "illegitimate" roots, he is also the victim of successive betrayals by his real and adopted mothers. Yuddie's death is a denial of change, for any hope for the future eventually dissipates in his rejection of this possibility. Refusal, however, leads not to finality but inconclusiveness, hence the serial quality of the trilogy: Yuddie's subjectivity dissolves into a mirror image of his alter-ego; Chow Mo-wan's failed romances with So Lai-chen and her incarnations in *Mood* and *2046* continue this seriality by which the films also question the nostalgic impulse to resist time. Wong's cinematic reflection on nostalgia therefore goes beyond the nostalgic to question the nature of nostalgia, and by embracing one's memory of the past as artifice (a "serialized" act of reconstruction, idealization, and performance), Wong offers a new critical perspective on the historicity of *memory-as-artefact*. The "imagined heritage" in Wong's films, therefore, is subversive as long as it is also self-subversive. Wong's "new practice of the image" (Abbas 1997: 36) in these films amount to a new "practice of memory" sustained by an ironic consciousness of the fissures between memory and its material referent, hence the performativity of memory itself. Wong's tactic, thus, is to grapple with memory's lightness through an affectionate reinterpretation of its fleeting images.

The Politics of Collective Memory and the "Local Heritage Film"

A more recent phenomenon in Hong Kong cinema is what I would call the "local heritage film." This kind of film presents an interesting opportunity to examine the valorization of collective memory (*jiti jiyi* 集體記憶) in the local cinema and the mutual inflection of cinematic and social articulations of a predominant strain of local history. Different from both the playful and nonchalant intertextual free-quoting found in nostalgic comedies in the 1990s and the more self-reflexive and complex renditions of personal memories in the New Wave and post-New Wave art films, the "local heritage film" celebrates a popular version of collective memory through the invocation of the so-called "Hong Kong Spirit." In short, the "Hong Kong Spirit" is a shorthand used by the mainstream media to refer to the typical Hong Konger, that is, the enterprising, energetic, resilient, and upwardly mobile everyman. The interest of the local heritage film lies in the entanglement between cinematic representations and the politics of collective memory and local heritage, which seems to have accelerated in the post-handover era. Indeed, the

politicizing of “collective memory” from below problematizes the discourse of national identity and patriotism that has infiltrated the mass media and public communication channels since 1997. As Carolyn Cartier argues, the post-handover decade has seen a widening base for conservation activism to develop into a kind of public “performance art” that actively intervenes in the political economy of urban renewal, which she sees as “a process that ultimately eviscerates places of people’s experience and local memory.” (Cartier 2010: 27)

As far as the cinema is concerned, between 2007 and 2010, a number of films have been hailed as “films for the local people.” (Note that the Hong Kong film industry has been preoccupied with co-productions with mainland China in the last ten years or so, delivering historical epics and martial arts blockbusters targeted at mainland audiences.) These “new local films” include two Shaw Brother productions, *Turning Point* (a.k.a. *Laughing Gor: the Movie*, Herman Yau, 2009) and *72 Tenants of Prosperity* (Eric Tsang, 2010), *Mr. Cinema* (Samson Chiu, 2007), a “reunification film” commissioned by the local branch of a China-based studio, Sil-Metropole, *Echoes of the Rainbow* (2009), a popular art film by Alex Law, and *Gallants* (Derek Kwok and Clement Cheng, 2010), a self-parodic *kung fu* retro after *Kung Fu Hustle*. The success of *72 Tenants* increased the confidence of filmmakers in making “Hong Kong films” for the Hong Kong people. Not all these films are concerned with heritage and urban conservation, but in different ways they all celebrate the “Hong Kong Spirit” and the “Hong Kong Story” as the very basis to redefine Hong Kongers’ collective identity. While *72 Tenants* is a parodic present-day sequel to a 1970s Shaw production, *The House of 72 Tenants* (Chor Yuen, 1973) – itself an adaptation of a Shanghai film of the same title in the 1940s – *Mr. Cinema* tells the story of Hong Kong from the perspective of a leftist. In both films the “Hong Kong spirit” stands out as the most treasured asset of the city despite the conflicting values and beliefs of the fictional characters. *72 Tenants* opens with a direct quotation from the alley community of the original film, followed by a time-travel-like one-shot transition to the present: Sai Yeung Choi Street, Mongkok, one of the most popular shopping districts in Hong Kong. We soon realize that this film is actually not a remake, but a sequel to the original, for the main characters in the original film have now become middle-aged parents and rival shop-owners. *Mr. Cinema*, on the other hand, tells the life-story of a die-hard leftist, Old Kong (Anthony Wong), who finally comes to realize he has been betrayed by his times. The melodramatic narrative is filled with comic moments when Kong’s son takes the centre stage, trying every means to undercut his father’s beliefs in search of his “first bucket of gold” in mainland China in the 1980s. These “local films for local people” are warmly received by critics despite their uneven cinematic accomplishments. (Elley 2007; Mudge 2010) They also have generated online and media discussion about “Hong Kong virtues,” which the filmmakers as well as the main cast publicly endorsed.¹⁰

Echoes, *Mr. Cinema*, and *72 Tenants* are generally regarded as cinematic incarnations of the “Hong Kong Spirit,” the common understanding of which resonates

with the clichéd “Hong Kong success story” that used to appear in official campaigns to promote the city under British colonial rule. Such a success story has also demonstrated a high degree of consistency from the colonial times to the present. If the commercial opportunism of the Chinese New Year film and the political correctness of the reunion film are symptomatic of the economic and political conditions of cultural production nowadays, this grand narrative has also infiltrated the sentimental time-journey of *Echoes*, albeit in a different artistic register. Written and directed by Alex Law, the film is a fictionalized recollection of Law’s childhood memories seen through the eyes of its child protagonist, Big Ears. In numerous press interviews and public forums, Law and producer Mabel Cheung speak of their own nostalgia for a bygone age of innocence and compassion, qualities that seem to be missing in both the lived reality and the cultural imagination of the present:

At the centre of *Echoes of the Rainbow* is [compassion]... Since the turn of the century Hong Kong cinema has been full of emotional excess and violence for the sake of visual excitement. Little room is left for compassion and affection... now that this film has become [a part of] Hong Kong’s collective memory, [the audience] know that... we all have lived through difficult times. Why can’t we hold on to this Hong Kong spirit to face the challenges at the present? (*Epoch Times* 2010 [my translation].)

Primarily a story about family hardships and tribulations overcome by resilience and perseverance, Law’s film is a sincere effort to revive this “Hong Kong spirit.” The cinematography and set design effectively reconstruct the impoverished working-class community which, despite its lack of means, proudly stands out as a cozy, colorful, and dignified home for the ordinary folks. Cinematically transformed, the dilapidated neighborhood of the historic Wing Lee Street comes to signify the core values of the Hong Kong people, a reminder of shared origins that Hong Kongers can identify with. Winning the Silver Bear prize at the Berlin International Film Festival in 2010 greatly increased the social impact of the film. International exposure provided much needed fuel to a local conservation campaign against the demolition of the vernacular buildings in Wing Lee Street, for which producer Mabel Cheung had made repeated public appeals. The heated public debate that followed pressured the government to abandon its original blueprint in favor of complete preservation. Insofar as heritage is the work of representation and a form of social memory, the cinema performs certain “heritage functions” in fostering the collective memory of the local people. In the case of *Echoes*, the “Hong Kong story” is not too different from the dominant discourse: the collective memory represented in the film projects a distilled image of the 1960s, a decade shaped by the repercussions of the Cold War, the Vietnam War, and the Cultural Revolution. On the home front, public security and social stability were challenged by political activism, widespread police corruption, and mass riots. The scanty

references to class difference, police graft, emigration of the well-to-do and the disturbances in China are structured within a self-contained narrative of family bonding and romance, an idealized world that borders on the idyllic, by which I refer as much to the artistically touched-up version of Wing Lee Street as to the *desire* of its creator for a “complete preservation” of childhood dream/memory. As a result, the film, as much as the vernacular neighborhood being “preserved” through cinematic re-visualization, becomes a monument kept in a pristine condition, a warped zone buttressed by crafted images, the nostalgic sound track of the Monkeys’ “We’ll Be Dancing on the Moon,” and atmospheric props to authenticate a particular (if not consensual) vision of the past.

The meticulous effort to obtain verisimilitude in *Echoes* approximates Wong Kar-wai’s 1960s trilogy in the use of artifice, but here artifice is less a subject of critical (self-) reflection than a self-authenticating tool. Law’s film is also indebted to the Cantonese melodrama in its portrayal of working-class life, communal bonding, teenage romance, and filial love and piety. The desire to recoup the working class ethos out-proportions the director’s artistic finesse in the final scene: Mrs. Law and the now grown-up Big Ears visit the graves of Mr. Law and Desmond. As mother and son slowly walk away from the graveyard, the camera pulls back to reveal a rainbow arching across a clear blue sky. Chinese audiences will not miss the allusion to the old saying: *yu guo tian qing* (the sky will clear up after the rain). The rainbow, a visual rhyme with the film’s title, symbolizes the transcendence of youth and innocence, ideal qualities personified by Desmond, a good-to-a-fault character whose premature death from leukemia brings the film to its emotional climax. More than coincidentally, Desmond has composed a song before his death, also titled “Echoes of the Rainbow.” As a symbol of hope, atonement, and love, the rainbow literally, and visually, bridges the past and the present. Having Aarif Lee play both Desmond and the grown-up Big Ears doubly inscribes this message in the film narrative. In short, narrative closure is achieved through a unity of theme, characterization, and symbolism in an affectionately nostalgic tale of loss redemption.

From the City to the Great Society: Counter-thought in *Datong*

Screen histories in Hong Kong cinema go beyond what is outlined above. Due to limited space this chapter has left out other equally deserving examples. In closing, I would like to go one step beyond the “Hong Kong story” to explore the diasporic vision in a recent independent film, Evans Chan’s *Datong: the Great Society* (2011). Chan, an established writer, director, and film critic based in New York, is well-known for his unyielding “indie” spirit in making films that actively demand the audience to be intellectually, culturally, and artistically engaged. *Datong*, premiered

in a select circuit of art house venues in Hong Kong and North America in late 2011, has triggered tremendous critical interest worldwide. The subject of this film is the legendary life of the late-Qing philosopher and political reformer, Kang Youwei. Consistent with Chan's interest in exploring the meaning of China and Chineseness through the diasporic connections between persons, times, and places, the film recasts Kang as a liberal-minded Chinese scholar between cultures, his patriotism informed by both the Confucian ideal of *datong* ("great unity," or "great society" in Chan's translation) and a budding globalism inspired by his travels to Europe (especially Sweden, his second home in exile). In Chan's film, the exilic is further dramatized in adapted scenes from August Strindberg's *A Dream Play* (1901), a structural device to enable one of the most prominent public figures in modern Chinese history to reveal his intimate thoughts and feelings in the first person. *Datong* has a visual and structural complexity that cannot be fully addressed here. The following discussion will highlight the nuanced articulations of Kang's diasporic identity and its contemporary resonances.

Chan's portrayal of Kang departs from conventional historical representations, which tend to treat him as a once-influential political reformer who faded into oblivion after the failure of the One Hundred Days Reform. Kang's advocacy for a European-style constitutional monarchy was soon eclipsed by Sun Yat-sen's revolutionary thought that eventually brought down the Qing dynasty. *Datong* was initially passed over by Taiwan's Golden Horse Awards and the Hong Kong International Film Festival. Ironically, it has been enthusiastically received in the academic circle as an original and thought-provoking film about the predicament of modern Chinese intellectuals, if not China at large.¹¹ In the film, Kang (Liu Kai-chi) and his daughter, Kang Tongbi (Lindzay Chan), become interlocutors in Strindberg's play. Their dramatized performances are woven into the first-person narrative of Chiang Ching, a present-day contemporary dance choreographer based in Sweden. These three interlocking voices mobilize the inquiry into the life and career of Kang in what Chan calls a "docudrama."

A noteworthy element of the dramatized part of the docudrama is the mix of English and Chinese dialogues in the conversations between Kang and his daughter. Although Kang the "liberal-minded patriarch" occupies the centre stage, Tongbi steals the spotlight by the proud assertion that she was "the first woman to travel from China to the West." Indeed, she was also the first Asian to graduate from the Barnard College of Columbia University. Well versed in English, Tongbi played an instrumental role in supporting her father's cause during Kang's exile in Europe, and later became a pioneer in the women's rights movement in China. Lindzay Chan, the lead actress in Evans Chan's early work *To Liv(e)* (1992), is elegantly dressed in traditional Indian sarongs as she (speaking in English) engages in a dialogue with her father (speaking in Cantonese), who looks back, and downwards as if from Heaven, on his "previous" life. Chan's film has been applauded by filmmakers, critics, and scholars as an original, provocative, and postmodern

rendition of the biography of Kang. By foregrounding the transformative power of Kang's travels in Europe and his intellectual and emotional connections to Sweden, the film is deeply informed by Chan's diasporic vision and aesthetics in its intellectual ruminations on China at the crossroads between reform and revolution, nationalism and internationalism, and no less China's still continuing project of modernity.

At a post-screening forum held at the Hong Kong Arts Centre in December 2011, Chan was asked whether Kang in the film represented an "alternative path" for China's modern nation-building at the turn of the century. In reply, Chan said the political realities of the time had precluded such an alternative. In another in-depth interview with Peter Zarrow (Chan and Zarrow 2011), Chan gives a more illuminating reply:

If my film has shown a perspective in which the boundary between reform and revolution has been blurred, it's because the perspective of dissidence has come to the fore through the filter of time. The question has become – how to effect political change?... Liu Xiaobo has been compared by some Chinese commentators to Liang [Qiqiao] (and Kang)... But the recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize is still serving a long prison sentence, most likely because of his advocacy of reform.

Chan's intellectual rumination takes him deeper into the lesser-known aspects of Kang's life and modern Chinese intellectual history as a whole. Throughout the film there is a consistent effort to recast Kang in a longer continuum of the Chinese intellectual diaspora. This is most apparent in the role of Chiang Ching as the narrator in the present. As Mette Hjort notes, "(Chiang Ching's) life story is well worth telling"... because of "the deep cultural connections that exist between her and Kang Youwei across a turbulent century" (quoted in Chan and Zarrow 2011).

When watching the film, my attention was drawn to Chan's emphasis on the appeal of the West to the intellectuals and how their diasporic identities relate to Chan's experience as an artist and intellectual. Through Chan's lens Kang emerges as a transnational cosmopolitan intellectual whose vision of the Great Society – a utopia where men and women are completely liberated from the conventions of marriage and sexual norms – was far ahead of his times, despite the fact that Kang also confesses to having concubines. If the East–West cultural dynamic is captured symbolically in the bilingual conversations between father and daughter in Strindberg's play, the episodes in Sweden, including contemporary scenes where Chiang Ching takes us through her own journey of migration, seem to underscore the centrality of exile and migration to the intellectual/artistic maturity and fulfilment of the Chinese subject rejected and persecuted by his/her peers at home. Kang's conflicted feelings of homesickness toward China, it seems, is premised upon his deep appreciation of, and affection for, Sweden, which appears in the film

as the closest approximation of *datong*. (The film's Chinese title, "*Datong: Kang Youwei in Sweden*" [*Datong: Kang Youwei zai Ruidian*], makes explicit the centrality of exile and displacement in this docudrama.)

In foregrounding Kang as a diasporic intellectual and an admirer of Western models of the modern state, *Datong* has presented not only an extremely complex and modernized version Kang's life-story, but also, through its central character, an allegory of the contemporary Chinese "border intellectual." In this projected fictionalized world stage, Chan himself is also a fitting persona to continue the "dream play" of Kang and the successive generations of diasporic intellectuals. In Chan's film, Chinese history is framed in the cross-cultural and trans-temporal drama of *A Dream Play* where historical figures are brought back to re-enact their legendary lives. In a different way, Chan, not unlike Wong Kar-wai, is aware of the performative nature of historical memory, especially when rendered in the cinematic medium. As a docudrama set at a critical juncture in modern Chinese history, *Datong* has folded in the contradictions and predicaments of a Hong Kong filmmaker trying to make sense of and come to terms with his own diasporic pedigree vis-à-vis China, and his own Chineseness, in and through the luminal figure of Kang Youwei, an exemplary diasporic and cosmopolitan Chinese intellectual in early twentieth-century China. Chan's weariness over Han ethnocentrism today gives credence to this conjecture: "One important debate I try to retrieve was the one between the reformers and the revolutionaries over the necessity of a civic-based, versus an ethnicity-based, nationhood for the new nation-state, the forgetting of which has haunted China to this date" (Chan and Zarrow 2011).

Datong is a different kind of screen history in Hong Kong cinema. The film bears the imprint of a self-reflexive consciousness in dialogue with its own existential condition. From casting, subject matter, dialogue, structure, and style, Chan has made a statement on modern Chinese history as well as his own intellectual and artistic upbringing that has shaped his vision of China and Chineseness. Chan's aesthetics may come across as elitist, but the interest in intertextuality and performativity calls History into question, a trait shared by other "Hong Kong" films discussed above. Instead of returning to local roots, Chan's film revisits an important intellectual and political debate since the turn of the twentieth-century that eventually determined the course of modern Chinese history in the next one hundred years. As a "Hong Kong film," *Datong* is not entirely a "local film for the local people," but underneath its globalism is a perplexed Chineseness characteristic of many local films. While history in this film is by no means light, *Datong* concludes with a note of lyrical transcendence, when Kang Youwei and Kang Tongbi resume their roles in *A Dream Play* as if they have ascended to a higher level of consciousness. Chan might have intended this as a tactic of "lightness," a philosophical counter-thought to Hong Kong cinema's historical lightness.

Notes

- 1 "Lishi de chenzhong" are the title words of Wang Hongzhi's book on mainland China's discourse on Hong Kong history, while author Ai Pei's book, *Jiao fuqin tai chenzhong* (literally *Calling [him] "Father" is Too Heavy*) is a memoir about ex-Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai. Ai claimed to be Zhou's illegitimate daughter, and triggered an official media campaign against both author and the book in China.
- 2 The dynamics between the national and transnational in Chinese cinema is discussed in Berry and Farquhar (2006: 1–16). A more general discussion of transnationalism in the world cinema context can be found in Ezra and Rowden (2006: 1–12).
- 3 Chris Patten, Hong Kong's "last governor," exemplifies this school of thought. See Thomas Wong (2003: 227–228).
- 4 Bauman's critique assumes that modernity has reached its limits in the late twentieth-century, when technologies of speed have announced the dissolution of modernity's promise of progress and its replacement by the new order of the postmodern version of global techno-capitalism. The sense of exhaustion associated with the fin-de-siècle is clearly present in Bauman's critique.
- 5 An informative discussion of the original Black Rose films and their remakes in the 1990s can be found in *The Illuminated Lantern* (Nepstad 2004).
- 6 So's cheongsams are a marker of temporal shifts in the film. According to Pam Cook, the cheongsams, "encapsulate past, present and future in a single image, resolving irreconcilable social tensions and contradictions in much the same way as myth." See Cook (2005: 1–22).
- 7 This aspect is discussed in Lee (2009: 26–30).
- 8 Western-style fashion (fancy T-shirts, shiny leather shoes, skirts, and tight-fitting pants) was to replace traditional outfits in the late 1960s. This new code of fashion is featured in the urban films of Kong Ngee.
- 9 In a press interview in 2004, Wong said he had intended the film to about the political change in 1997, and a reflection on "things that are unchanged over time." Cited in Teo (2005: 134).
- 10 Samson Chiu and the film's main cast unanimously identify with the "Hong Kong virtues" celebrated in the film: steadfastness, independence, and a strong will to survive (*Chinanews.com* 2007).
- 11 Among those cited in the publicity material are Jonathan Spence, Leo Lee, Chris Berry, and Ann Hui. Leo Lee has published a review in *Yazhou zhoukan* (*Asia Magazine*) to "give due recognition to the film's artistic achievement" and to "stimulate critical discussion in the cultural circle across the Straits." See Leo Lee (2011). In December 2011, Chan received the "Movie of the Year" award for this film in an event organized by the *Southern Metropolis Daily* (*Nanfang dushi bao*). The theme of the event was "reviving the humanistic spirit in the city (*ba renwen huan gei chengshi*)."

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The Tales of Fang Peilin and Zhu Shilin

From Rethinking Hong Kong Cinema to Rewriting Chinese Film History

Ain-ling Wong

Introduction: A Brief Review of Studies and Research at Hong Kong Film Archive

The work of a film archive is always a race against time. Compared to many other places, Hong Kong Film Archive (HKFA) is a latecomer, which means that the vast majority of our film heritage has already been lost for good. Much effort has thus been taken to dig into the past while trying always to keep an eye open on the present because the present will be the past in the future. One can imagine the thrill we experience when we go through precious donations, not only films and film-related materials, but also very personal belongings of film people as diaries, notebooks, bits and pieces of papers, photos with families, friends and colleagues, books they read, and so on. Over the years, HKFA has conducted numerous studies on different aspects of Hong Kong cinema based on these “time capsules” and has helped to enrich and modify our understanding of its history. I firmly believe that the past illuminates the present. My personal interest lies in the lineage between the pre-1949 Chinese cinema and Hong Kong cinema, and happily it falls within the scope of the research initiated by the archive.

In Hong Kong, one of the first systematic studies on Hong Kong cinema from the academic sector came from I.C. Jarvie’s *Window on Hong Kong: A Sociological Study of the Hong Kong Film Industry and its Audience*, published by the University of Hong Kong’s Centre of Asian Studies in 1977. As if by coincidence, the same year

also witnessed the debut of the Hong Kong International Film Festival (HKIFF), excelling not only by its dynamic programming with a particular focus on Asian cinema, but above all by its resourceful retrospectives on Hong Kong cinema accompanied by the publication of catalogues, each well researched and documented.¹ Critics and scholars like the late Lin Nien-tung, Lau Shing-hon, Shu Kei, Li Cheuk-to, Law Kar, and many others are all to be commended for their tremendous contributions. This series of publications have since been an invaluable source for scholars and researchers interested in the study of Hong Kong cinema, and still stands as such. Meanwhile, the call for the setting up of a film archive to conserve film heritage also started to pick up momentum.

The Hong Kong Film Archive as we come to know today was officially inaugurated in 2001, marking another significant stage in the study and research of Hong Kong cinema. Apart from its increasingly rich collection of films and film-related materials, HKFA has also begun to build itself a reputation for its systematic documentation and research on Hong Kong cinema. In terms of publications, there are three main categories: Hong Kong Filmography series, Oral History series, and monographs on special topics.

The Filmographies series could be seen as foundation blocks of a building. The late Mr. Yu Mo-wan, a veteran researcher on Hong Kong cinema and among the first of local specialists to join HKFA, was the one who kicked off the project. So far, seven volumes have been published, from the beginning of Hong Kong cinema to the mid-1970s. The research is now forging full steam ahead into the mid to late 1970s. Leafing through documentation on the decade, we would find that the Taiwan element was a crucial factor in the local film industry of the time. With its extremely complex trans-regional productions where both talent and money criss-cross knowing almost no boundary, it is often difficult, if not impossible for us now to differentiate a Taiwan production from a Hong Kong one. The situation certainly rings a bell today when globalization reigns and CEPA has dramatically modified the local film industry. In-depth studies into this period will certainly shed light on the present relationship between Hong Kong and mainland Chinese cinema, and to a greater extent, the Chinese-speaking cinema in general. In this sense, *Hong Kong Filmography* Volume VII (1970–74) and the upcoming Volume VIII (1975–79) pick up studies initiated by our colleagues at HKIFF in 1984 with the publication of *A Study of Hong Kong Cinema in the 1970s*, bringing us all the nearer to the present day.

The oral history project was initiated in 1994 when HKFA was still in its preparatory stage. Since then, well over two hundred interviews have been conducted, the majority of which have been transcribed and are available for public access. Some have been selected and collated for publication under Oral History Series. *Hong Kong Here I Come* (2000), the first in the series, is a selection of interviews of eight film veterans who came to Hong Kong from the mainland after the war. This is followed by *An Age of Idealism: Great Wall & Feng Huang Days* (2001), tracing the paths of nine key film personalities of the two leftist film companies. The succeeding

volumes – *Director Chor Yuen* (2006), *Wang Tin Lam* (2007, in Chinese only), and *The An Emerging Modernity: Hong Kong Cinema of the 1960s* (2008, in Chinese only) bear witness to the transition of Hong Kong cinema from the 1950s to the 1960s, whilst the newest in the series *Director Lung Kong* (2010) testifies to the trajectory of a filmmaker who consciously charged himself with the mission of modernizing Cantonese cinema, in short, a flag bearer in the reform of Hong Kong cinema in the 1960s and 1970s. *Chang Cheh: A Memoir* (2004), originally conceived as another in the Oral History Series, eventually materialized in the form of a memoir by the director himself as he was unable to communicate orally in his last years. The reminiscences of Chor Yuen, Lung Kong, and Chang Cheh lead us through the 1950s into the 1970s.

In addition to this series, the archive has also published the diaries of *The Diary of Lai Man-wai* (2003) and *Evan Yang's Autobiography* (2009, in Chinese only), both historical documents donated by their family members. They are of great significance not only for film specialists, but also of referential relevance for other historians interested in contemporary Chinese history.

Another sector of HKFA publications involves monographs on topical research, from studio studies as *The Cathay Story* (1st edition 2002, revised edition 2010), *The Shaw Screen – A Preliminary Study* (2003), *The Glorious Modernity of Kong Ngee* (2006), *Wenyi renwu xinlian qiusuo* (*On Sun Luen and its Cultural Mission*, 2011), *One for All: The Union Film Spirit* (2011), and *Golden Harvest: Leading Change in Changing Times* (2013) to individual filmmakers and artists as *The Cinema of Lee Sun-fung* (2004), *Li Han-hsiang, Storyteller* (2007), *Zhu Shilin: A Filmmaker of His Times* (2008), *The Swordsman and His Jianghu – Tsui Hark and Hong Kong Film* (2002), *Ren Jianhui duben* (*A Yam Kim-fai Reader* 2004), and *Zhang Ailing: Dianmou jubenji* (*Eileen Chang: MP & GI Screenplays*, 2010).

Collective efforts have also been made to revisit historical footprints of Hong Kong cinema in specific context while trying to anchor them in a larger picture. *The Hong Kong–Guangdong Film Connection* (2005) tries to rekindle the city's close ties with Guangzhou and Lingnan culture, an area long overlooked academically in the past. The most recent, *Mastering Virtue: The Cinematic Legend of a Martial Artist* (2002), with the spotlight on the legendary Wong Fei-hong figure, reinstates and further explores the influence of Lingnan culture on local cinema. *Xianggang xiayu dianying fangzong* (*The Amoy-dialect Films of Hong Kong*, 2012) and *Xianggang chaoyu dianying xunji* (*The Chaozhou Dialect Films of Hong Kong*, 2013) are foundation research on long-forgotten pages of the history of the local film industry in the 1950s and early 1960s and will certainly be quoted as references in any future studies in the area; they also readily lend themselves to academic frameworks such as indigenous culture and trans-nationalism. *Lengzhan yu xianggang dianying* (*Cold War and Hong Kong Cinema*, 2009), highlighting the impact of international politics on the local industry, unveils the very ambiance of an apparently “apolitical” cinema. It certainly helps to shed light on the world of today as the Cold War has never quite gone away. And, *Zhongguo dianying suoyuan* (*Chinese Cinema: Tracing the*

Origins, 2011), with its emphasis on historicity, questions established views and methodology and opens up new horizons for possible revisions, thus shaking up some long-established ideas about Chinese film history, which we have so often taken for granted; film historian Huang Xiaolei's essay questioning the justification of *The Difficult Couple* (Zhang Shichuan, 1913) as the first Chinese fiction film and the Law Kar–Frank Bren duo's study on the origins of Hong Kong cinema, are convincing examples of the kind.

Over the years, some key figures in Chinese film history such as the Lai Buk-hoi/Lai Man-wai (Li Beihai/Li Minwei) brothers and Lo Ming-yau (Luo Mingyou) have been re-evaluated in the light of their Hong Kong/Guangdong origin and connections. The contribution of Benjamin Brodsky to early Hong Kong cinema has been explored in depth, putting him on the map of Chinese film history. Studies on the 1930s Shanghai top studio Lianhua (*Lianhua yingye gongsi*, United Photo Services) referred to the significance of its Hong Kong high society network as well as the socio-political strength of the city itself.

As for the Shanghai–Hong Kong linkage, much research have already been done by scholars worldwide, whose works we are greatly indebted to.² Personally, I am particularly intrigued by the relationship between the Chinese cinema of the Japanese occupied Shanghai and the Hong Kong cinema of the 1950s and 1960s. This chapter is an attempt to sketch the creative paths of Feng Peilin and Zhu Shilin, dwelling more on the situation of individual filmmakers caught in the vicissitudes of history, how and what they have brought over from the heyday of a film industry plagued by war to the cinema of postwar Hong Kong. More concretely, I will focus on their skills of genre filmmaking acquired within the confines of Japanese-occupied Shanghai and how they relate to the situation of the postwar local cinema.

Fang Peilin: The Legacy of His Musicals

Fang Peilin (1908–1948) is one of the many Chinese filmmakers stranded in occupied Shanghai and who had traveled to and from Hong Kong and Shanghai after the Sino-Japanese War, with the intention of settling in more permanently with the aim of continuing his career in the colony.

Originally a graduate from the Shanghai Art School, he started off as a set designer in 1928 at the Xinren Film Company, then in the Great China Film Company (Dazhonghua) and Lianhua respectively. His real breakthrough came when he joined the Yihua Film Company and made his directorial debut with *Girl in Disguise* (1936). The film is a screwball comedy of a rich girl brought up as a boy because of her grandfather's preference for a male descendent. She falls in love with a young man, goes through a series of twists and turns before accomplishing the generic happy ending of the type. It was made at a time when the Nationalist government exerted huge pressure on Yihua which housed a number of leftist

artists. It was an instant hit (with Hong Kong cinema remakes in the 1950s), heightening the heated debate on film criticism that had been going on since 1933 between left-wing intellectuals and the Nationalist camp, with “progressive” critics accusing the film of being the epitome of “soft cinema”.³

Unlike his contemporary Wu Yonggang, whose debut *The Goddess* (1935) was instantly recognized as a masterpiece but whose subsequent career was badly hampered by harsh criticisms from the leftist camp for his succeeding works such as *The Little Angel* (1936), Fang maintained his success with no guilt, following *Girl in Disguise* with a string of sequels and a sing-song film *The More the Merrier* (1939). The charming singer-actress Zhou Xuan was cast as the female lead in the latter, and one of the songs in the film “When Will You Be Back?” (*Herijunzailai*) took Shanghai by storm. It is still fondly remembered and sung today. The two became close collaborators, working together on a number of sing-song films, from occupied Shanghai (*Song of Love*, 1944, and *The Love Birds*, 1945) to postwar Hong Kong (*Orioles Banished from the Flowers*, 1948, and *Song of a Songstress*, 1948),⁴ all cashing in on Zhou Xuan’s charisma.

Fang’s craftsmanship extended to genres of different kinds, as in *Thunderstorm* (1938), a melodrama adapted from a well-known play by Cao Yu, or *Empress Wu Chieh Tien* (1939), a spectacular costume film, both examples of “serious” filmmaking in the conventional sense, with a strong message. However, it seems that his greatest passion was reserved for Hollywood-style musicals. Although earlier films like *The More the Merrier* featured a number of songs, his first real try at the musical genre was *The Ninbo Fairy* (1943), followed by *Myriad of Colors* (1943), both made under the patronage of the puppet-regime studio Zhonglian (Zhongguo lianhe zhipian gufen gongsi, China United Productions). If the musical is defined as a film genre in which songs are interwoven with the narrative, then Fang’s musical films, though maybe not quite up to the standards of Hollywood classics, stand close to the concept.⁵

The Ninbo Fairy is the story of a dancing girl on board an ocean liner who falls in love with the troupe’s manager. Betrayed by the greedy man who is only after her money, she commits suicide by jumping into the ocean. The film starts with a performance of “The Ninbo Fairy,” with the female lead jumping into the sea. No copy of the film is known to exist, but it is interesting to note that it was made a year before *Bathing Beauty* was released. Speaking of Fang’s musicals, one always refers to the influence of Hollywood musicals, which is obvious and certainly not to be disputed. Fang himself did not deny the fact that he learned from them. On one occasion, he openly criticized the non-professionalism of Chinese singing and dancing performances: “In *The Ninbo Fairy*, although serious efforts have been made, short term training did not yield satisfactory results.”⁶

But there is another factor that we often overlook: the impact of Japanese musicals. In this sense, 1943 could be considered a landmark in the history of the Chinese musical genre. That very year, to celebrate the third anniversary of the Wang (Jingwei) puppet government, Japan sent the Toho Musical Troupe (*Dongbao*

gewutuan) to China, touring Nanjing and Shanghai, and even lined up a collaborative project with Zhonglian. The result was the making of *Myriad of Colors*, Fang's second musical, with the Toho troupe performing in the film. The troupe, boasting over 200 attractive, professionally trained young girls, had ten years' experience behind it, performing in Tokyo's Japan Theater, the biggest in the city. Their show combined songs, dance, Japanese folk dance, and short plays.⁷

As a film, *Myriad of Colors* has obvious flaws. The script, in particular, is absolutely unconvincing, especially given the highly restrictive situation of the puppet-regime studio. It tells the story of a young, highly talented girl singer, who rallies the support of a visiting Japanese troupe to mount a fundraising performance for orphans. No explanation, of course, is given as to what has brought about this glut of street orphans, though the cause is obvious to every Chinese.⁸ The irony is the seeking of help from those who, voluntarily or involuntarily, are part of the war machine. In the last scene, a dissolve brings us from the splendors of the stage to the orphanage. A large group of blossoming youths and lovely children stand in neat rows on an extended stretch of meadow, singing enthusiastically in celebration of universal love. The film itself is a living witness to the absurdities of war, although the *mise-en-scène* of the musical parts, with lavish sets, professional performances, and fluid camera movements, reveals a promising maker of the musical films.

Fang was ready for a big effort, on his own. Immediately after the war he made *The Wonders of Oriole* (1946),⁹ another musical, modeling it upon Hollywood movies. The page of history having turned over, this time the film was made for the state-owned Zhongdian (Zhongyang dianying sheying chang, Central Film Studio). In a sense, it is almost a propaganda film, advocating the reconstruction of a war-stricken China under the leadership of the Nationalist government, but curiously seasoned by conflicting ideologies. It opens with the "Plum Flower March," the plum flowers being an obvious emblem of the Nationalist government. On the other hand, the film manifests extremely complex underlying resonances. The song sequence "Creativity" ("*Chuangzao*"), for example, is a chorus on postwar reconstruction, with an impressive montage of the working class, reminiscent of certain "progressive" 1930s classics like Sun Yu's *The Big Road* (1934).

Reading the lyrics, we could easily take the song as a proletariat eulogy:

We are the motor of society, we are the sentry of our times.
 With our blood and sweat, with our blood and sweat
 We've written history.
 Who could match our efforts and contribution?
 We are the motor of society, we are the sentry of our times.
 The new world the new world, yet to be created by us,
 The new world the new world, yet to be created by us.
 (lyrics by Li Shen)¹⁰

Peace did not prevail in the postwar years. The new world did come, in 1949, meeting the aspiration of many, but to the dismay of others.

Another point of interest in the film is its attitude towards proletarian art (or art for the popular masses). The female protagonist is a famous singer under the tutelage of an aged music professor who has developed a strong sense of ownership over her. The girl, in all her glamour, performs for the privileged class only. But after she becomes acquainted with a poor young musician, she becomes increasingly drawn to the ideal of “art for all.” This lofty pursuit culminates in the final scene where she performs on May 1, Labor Day, for a proletarian audience, and the obsessed professor, depressed by the “betrayal” of his protégée, shoots himself in the head amidst the enthusiastic crowd. Interestingly, the views on art manifested by the protagonists in the film are close to the spirit of Mao Zedong’s 1942 Yan’an Forum on Literature and Art. Here is the song sung by the transformed singer:

Tuning the strings, I sing out aloud,
Singing the joys and sorrows of humanity:
The extravagance of the rich, the anxieties of the poor,
The stupidity of the traitors, the undaunted strength of martyrs.
But I swear in all defiance,
Art should not be wealth’s decoration only.
I want the mass to appreciate,
I want the mass to be nourished.
The joy of humanity is my reward.
Art is for all, art is for all.

(lyrics by Wen Lang)¹¹

Notwithstanding its confusing ideologies, and without the backup of the musical troupe of the Japanese-occupation days, Fang Peilin managed to deliver an unsettling work for the time, curiously combining messages from conflicting political agendas within the entertaining format of a musical.

Like many of his contemporaries, Fang intended to move his filmmaking career to Hong Kong after the war. After trying his hand with the filming of *Orioles Banished From the Flowers* and *Song of a Songstress*, he agreed to make a musical *The Sound of Magic*, for Yung Hwa Motion Picture Industries. He had high hopes for the future as the ambitious Yung Hwa was apparently in good shape. Compared to the troubling times he had lived in, postwar Hong Kong should have been relatively free of political constraints. After all, his ambition was to make a musical of Hollywood standard.¹² His plan was to settle things first in the colony before flying his wife and children over. However, fate decided otherwise; the plane he took on December 21 1948 never made it to the island.

Fang’s passion for musicals never came to fruition in Hong Kong, but his legacy passed on. Tracing back the lineage of the local musical genre, Fang Peilin is undoubtedly a significant figure. Doe Ching (Tao Qin), who scripted all three of Fang’s above-mentioned musicals, made a few accomplished musicals in the 1950s and 1960s: *Calendar Girl* (1956) for Cathay, and *Les belles* (1961), *Love Parade* (1963),

and *The Dancing Millionairess* (1964) for Shaw Brothers. *Calendar Girl*, in particular, has remained a classic of the genre.

Though not impressive in quantity, they certainly set the trend in the Mandarin cinema of the time and triggered a wave of musicals, persisting in the Cantonese cinema with teen musicals starring the teen idols Connie Chan Po-chu and Josephine Siao Fong-fong in the mid-1960s.

Yue Feng (1909–1999), another important postwar director, was also a colleague of Fang Peilin in his tenure at Zhonglian and Huaying (Zhonghua dianying lianhe gongsi, China Film United). Knowing the background, we should not be surprised by the undertone of “Japaneseness” in his Mandarin musicals of the 1950s – *Rainbow as You Wish* (1953) and *Merry Go-round* (1956), with the latter boasting three spectacular singing and dancing scenes, filmed in Eastmancolor with the participation of the Shochiku Musical Troupe from Japan. The influence stretches to Evan Yang (Yi Wen, 1920–1978) whose film credentials as director include two musicals – *It’s Always Spring* (1962) and *Because of Her* (1963), not to mention the string of musicals by Inoue Utmetsugu for SB in the late 1960s and early 1970s. To return to the Japanese influence which may have been passed down via Fang Peilin’s works, in the musical scenes of *Rainbow as You Wish*, *Calendar Girl* and *It’s Always Spring*, the female leads often cross-dress as handsome young men, a common trope on the stage of the all-girl revue *Takarazuka*.¹³

Zhu Shilin: Escapist Filmmaking within the Confines of Harsh Reality

Compared to Feng Peilin, Zhu Shilin (1899–1967) was at once lucky and tragic. He lived long enough to see his film career grow and flourish in colonial soil, but also to witness the absurdities of human history, which he had probably never fully comprehended.

Zhu has long been widely recognized as one of the greatest filmmakers in postwar Hong Kong. His film career spanned over 30 years. From his youthful experiences at Lianhua in 1930s Shanghai, his stint at Zhonglian and Huaying during the Japanese occupation in Shanghai, and finally to his collaboration with Great China Film Company, Yung Hwa Motion Picture, Dragon-Horse (Loon-Ma) Films, Feng Huang, and Great Wall Movie Enterprise in postwar Hong Kong, he never ceased making films, turning in over a hundred titles.

Unlike Fei Mu, who chose to quit filmmaking altogether for the stage when the Shanghai film industry collapsed towards the end of 1941, Zhu continued his film career under the patronage of the puppet-regime studios. Whilst some of his works during the Orphan Island period carried cryptic anti-invasion messages, for instance *Fragrant Princess* (1940) and *Dangerous Mission* (1941),¹⁴ his Zhonglian and Huaying period witnessed an entirely new phase, transplanting the battlefield to

the bedroom, waging a gender war instead. In the few surviving prints available for viewing at the China Film Archive in Beijing, we can catch a glimpse of how Zhu spent the dark days of enemy occupation, holed up inside the fallen fortress, meticulously honing his craft in filmmaking.¹⁵

Let's start with *Universal Love* (1942), an omnibus blockbuster enlisting every A-list director in Zhonglian's stable to direct one of eleven segments. Most of the pieces are mediocre and unconvincing, contrived half-heartedly by the filmmakers to pay lip service to the Japanese; but Zhu's contribution, "Marital Love," is an exception. Shot as a farce, this nonsensical story about a man with two wives takes place in a confined space and is structured like a one-act play, with a tight time-line. A woman discovers that her husband has a mistress, and storms the "love nest," forcing him to choose one over the other. In the end, the mistress volunteers to leave, as in *Homecoming* (1934), an earlier family drama by the same director, where the unofficial spouse ends up doing the right thing when faced with a moral dilemma.

In the following year, Zhu wrote and directed *Changing Hearts* (1943). Though it is obviously modeled after 1930s Hollywood screwball comedies, thematically it is still a variation on the same marital drama. The male protagonist has an old fashioned, domesticated wife, who prefers the banality of hearth and home to the glamour of ballroom scenes. A socialite himself, he becomes infatuated with his modish and vivacious sister-in-law. The film opens with the camera panning across a luxuriously lit garden, and ends in the same spot after the husband has gone through trial and revelation, reconciling with his wife and returning to the safety zone of his marital life, surrounded by a group of friends. The treatment of this grand finale has the flavor of Chinese opera, but the mise-en-scène emulates spectacular Hollywood musicals. Indoors, everything is rosy in an opulent studio-manufactured world. Outside, the filth and hardships of wartime reality rage on. In an interview, Zhu explained with great frankness his own state of mind (probably that of most other filmmakers in the same boat):

When Zhonglian was founded, there were many subjects that everyone avoided like burning coals, such as politics or class.... In a nutshell, everyone was careful to tiptoe around anything vaguely hard line. As a result, filmmakers tried turning their attention to romance or family melodrama, as a solution to overcome the impasse. With our hands tied creatively, we were relieved to just pass the mark, and dared not hope to make great accomplishments. However, despite the control over screenplays, I think at least, I added a little something to the film, namely my own subjective viewpoint. Hopefully, the audience will come out of the cinema with something to ponder, and gain some insight.¹⁶

So, within the repressive constraints of the studio, Zhu conjured up an introspective erotic space, a sequestered bower of bliss that rivaled the sophistication

and wit of Lubitsch. At the same time, through the moralistic comments and stoic lifestyle of the wife, he made subtle references to the complex sentiments of Chinese filmmakers who were trapped in occupied Shanghai.

If such a film, with its sexual politics and fantasies anchored in lavish bourgeois settings, reminds one of the cinema of distraction modeled on Hollywood (and it is certainly comparable to the White Telephone films made in Italy under fascist rule), the films Zhu made a year later were a stylistic departure – a far more realistic approach. *The Modern Couple* (1944), which I have been able to watch in the Beijing Film Archive, is also focused on marital problems. It depicts the daily life story of a couple, the husband a professional writer and the wife a one-time intellectual trapped within the commonplace of familial chores. The drama crystallizes when they decide to switch roles, he the housewife and she the breadwinner. Another typical gender war, but this time anchored in an everyday setting.

Zhu Shilin was never “progressive” in the political sense, let alone an affiliate of the leftist cinema of the 1930s. In fact, when he was in Lianhua, he worked in close collaboration with Lo Ming-yau, head of the film company whose affiliation with the Nationalist government was obvious. Works such as *Civil Wind* (1935) have long been criticized as being reactionary. Curiously though, when he operated as head of the Feng Huang studio, a cooperative, he became a flag-bearer of the Hong Kong leftist cinema in the 1950s and 1960s. But, except for a brief stint in the early 1950s, with accomplished works like *The Show Must Go On* (1952) and *The Dividing Wall* (1952) vaguely echoing the spirit of the immediate post-1949 era, his films from 1954 to the end of the decade bear not the slightest trace of socialist ideology. They are mostly escapist cinema, like the vast majority of Hong Kong films, ranging from hilarious screwball comedies to middle-class melodramas. Curiously enough, some of them are explicitly reminiscent of his Zhonglian/Huaying period. *Mama Sings a Song* (1957), for example, is practically a remake of *The Modern Couple*, *Between Husband and Wife* (1958) a variation on the theme of *The Changing Hearts*, *The Three Pearls* (1959) an expanded version of “Marital Love” in *Universal Love*.

Judging from the leftist productions of the 1950s and 1960s, it is obvious that PRC was not intent on promoting its ideology in Hong Kong, aiming instead to maintain a point of contact with Chinese nationals inside and outside the colony. Though under the influence of the PRC, Feng Huang studio had to stand on its own feet financially. As founder and head of the business, Zhu had the dual responsibility of sustaining the livelihood of his colleagues and fulfilling the political mission of the company, both roles demanding great tact and wisdom. In this sense, he was a survivor, as the company fared well enough in the market with its line of harmless petit bourgeois comedies and dramas to compete with big studios like Shaw and Cathay. Apparently he was so good that even Run Run Shaw wanted to recruit him for a time.¹⁷ Life took on a dramatic twist as the Cultural Revolution kicked off in the mainland. Yao Wenyan’s ferocious article attacking Zhu’s 1948

classic *Sorrows of the Forbidden City* “The Two-faced Counter-Revolutionary Zhou Yang,” originally published in the January 1, 1967 launch issue of *Red Flag* (*Hong Qi*), was reprinted in the Hong Kong newspaper *Wen Wei Po* on January 5. After reading it, Zhu died of a stroke that very afternoon.¹⁸

I have mainly concentrated on his light-hearted comedies and dramas of marital life, highlighting his focus on the husband–wife relationship in the wartime puppet-regime studios and in the 1950s leftist cooperative, Feng Huang. With the skills and craftsmanship he had acquired and developed in the dark times of an occupied Shanghai, he led his colleagues through the Cold War tension of the 1950s and 1960s Hong Kong, not without compromise but primarily maintaining an honorable degree of independence and integrity, and remaining highly competitive, too, with the mogul studios of Cathay and Shaw. If we could review his complete body of work, we would see an artist of great complexity and sophistication, one of the many Chinese intellectuals influenced by and negotiating with the new values propelled by the May Fourth Movement on the one hand, and swimming in the turbulent tidal waves of his times on the other, prudently trying to maintain a decent subsistence. His last film, *Garden of Repose* (1964), is a perfect illustration of the situation.

Adapted to the screen from Ba Jin’s novel *Qi Yuan* by Xia Yan who responded to the promptings of Liao Chenzhi (then minister of the Communist Party’s Committee of Overseas Chinese Affairs) for literati to support progressive filmmaking in Hong Kong, it also corresponded to his own vision of a more liberal cinema in the mainland at a time when leftist dogmatism reigned.¹⁹ Xia Yan’s name did not appear on the credit list. Not long afterwards, he, like many others, was purged during the Cultural Revolution. In hindsight, the apparent calm of Zhu’s Hong Kong years is almost like the eye of a typhoon. His film career marks discontinuity as well as continuity in the long course of Chinese film history, and his sudden death much more than a mere footnote to the forces of the times.

Concluding Remarks

Research and studies conducted under the umbrella of HKFA so far have primarily been focused on the pre-1970s period, when the film industry was still divided into two major camps – Cantonese and Mandarin cinema. If we go back to history, we would find that the notion of “Hong Kong cinema” is not to be taken for granted.

Back in the 1920s and 30s, there were no “Hong Kong films,” only “Chinese films.” Things began to change when famous Cantonese opera actor Sit Kok-sin (Xue Juesheng) made the first Cantonese film *The Platinum Dragon* (1933) in Shanghai. It took Hong Kong and the conventional oversea markets (including Southeast Asia and America) by storm. After that, Cantonese cinema was here to stay, and even the controversial attempt to ban Cantonese filmmaking in the

mid-1930s failed to suffocate it.²⁰ Even so, it was perceived as dialect cinema and generally referred to as *guo pian* (Chinese films), with emphasis on the Cantonese dialect in film advertisements of early talkies of the 1930s. In film reviews and cinema magazines, for example, they were often called “Cantonese films” or even “South China Films.”²¹ The Cantonese/Mandarin film dichotomy should be seen in this light and it stayed so, categorically, through the 1950s and 1960s.

As a matter of fact, by the early 1970s Cantonese cinema was practically “dead” until Chor Yuan’s *The House of 72 Tenants* (1973) and Michael Hui’s *Games Gamblers Play* (1974) pulled the Cantonese film crowd back into the theaters. The huge success of these two films was largely due to their casts of primarily Cantonese-speaking television actors and actresses. After 1978, films dubbed in Cantonese became the mainstream of the local industry²² and with the miraculous surge in the 1980s and 1990s there arose the notion of “Hong Kong cinema,” a concept that has persisted to this day. But of course, along with the increasing dominance of the mainland Chinese market in the post-1997 era, a growing sense of anxiety has crept in, at times paranoiac, even in the academy, to the extent of forgetting to maintain a certain emotional distance and to allow the present situation to evolve and ferment before reaching a conclusion.

The *wuxia*, *kung fu*, and gangster genres have generated major interest in the west, both in the industry and academia. But Hong Kong cinema is not just action film: it has a rich tradition of “non-action” films, from light comedy, melodramas, and historical epics to singsong films, much of which is deeply rooted in the Chinese cinema of the 1930s and 1940s. It is not a coincidence that important post-war filmmakers such as Zhu Shilin, Yue Feng, Fang Peilin, and Doe Ching, all worked in Japanese-occupied Shanghai before coming to Hong Kong. Unlike their brilliant counterparts of the same period like Wu Yonggang and Sun Yu, whose development was heavily hampered by the turmoil and constraints brought by war and post-1949 arts and literary policies as well as the ensuing political movements in the mainland, this crop of filmmakers had a chance to sustain their film career in Hong Kong. This is historically significant on at least two levels: carrying the lineage of 1930s and 1940s Chinese cinema which had been brutally cut off from the post-1949 mainland Chinese cinema, and contributing to the blossoming of an extremely vibrant film scene, with its diversity of languages and genres, ironically never to be seen again in the local film industry, not even in the so-called golden 1980s and 1990s.

When we discuss with feverish passion the notion of identity (or the lack of it) in Hong Kong cinema today, it is perhaps also time to rethink Hong Kong cinema in the broader context of Chinese film history. By retracing our links with the past, we are not only reflecting on the complexities of our uniqueness, but also exploring grounds for actively participating in the rewriting of Chinese film history, which we have always either deliberately avoided being part of or suffered being excluded from on ideological grounds.

Notes

- 1 The first in the series is Lin, Nien-tung (ed.) (1978); the last is Law, Kar (ed.) (2000).
- 2 Among them are Law, Kar (ed.) (1994); Lee, Leo Ou-fan (1999); Fu, Poshek (2003).
- 3 Yihua was threatened with great pressure and even White terrorism for its production of progressive films after 1933. This coincided with the commencement of the theoretical battles between left-wing hard-cinema (*yingxing dianying*) and Nationalist soft-cinema (*ruanxing dianying*). For more on this, refer to Cheng Jihua, Li Shaobai and Xing Zuwen (1980).
- 4 Wong Tin-lam (Wang Tianlin) remade *Orioles Banished from the Flowers with A Challenge of Love* (*Rushi jiaren*) in 1960.
- 5 For more discussion on sing-song and musicals in Hong Kong cinema, see Law, Kar (ed.) (1993).
- 6 Fang Peilin (1943).
- 7 Dongbao Gewutuan (Toho Musical Troupe), in *Xin Yingtan*, 1943, 5.
- 8 The story outline is quite similar to “Ertong zhi ai” (“Children Love”) in *Bo’ai* (*Universal Love*).
- 9 The film is in the possession of the China Film Archive. A copy of the promotion brochure on the film is available for reference at the Hong Kong Film Archive.
- 10 *Yinfeirenjian tekan* (*The Free Oriole* promotion brochure) (1946).
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 In an article written by Fang Peilin himself on the filming of *The Free Oriole*, he said: “I dare not say that I am trying to compete with foreign films when I make *The Free Oriole* today, but at least I can say that I am learning from them. Chinese are not more stupid than westerners. Given a more satisfactory condition, I reckon it is not that difficult to produce a film like *Bathing Beauties*. Maybe, we could even bypass them.” From Fang Peilin (1946), “Jue bushi weile dianzhui dianzhui” (“Not just a piece of ornament”), *The Free Oriole* promotion brochure.
- 13 Like Toho Musical Troupe, Takarazuka Revue is an all-girl troupe, which still flourishes. Its history can be traced back to 1913 with a group of a much smaller scale. All male characters are played by cross-dressed girls, even today. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Takarazuka_Revue. Accessed 15 January, 2015.
- 14 Both movies are no longer available on film, but the resurfacing of the screenplays provides a valuable source for the understanding of Zhu’s contribution to this period. See Wong Ain-Ling (ed.) (2008).
- 15 Some of the discussion on Zhu Shilin’s filmmaking career in Japanese-occupied Shanghai and in the 1950s and 1960s Hong Kong has been drawn from the following essays, written by myself: “The Dividing Wall: Zhu Shilin’s Matrimonial Vision,” in Wong Ain-Ling (ed.) (2008); “From the Thirties to the Cold War Period – The Paths of Zhu Shilin and Yue Feng,” in Wong Ain-Ling (ed.) (2009).
- 16 “Zhu Shilin Xiansheng Duitan: Zhizuo Qingxiang Ji Qita” (“A dialogue with Zhulin: His Production Tendencies and Other Matters”), *Xin Yingtan* (*New Film Scene*), April 1943, 5.
- 17 “Oral History with Chu Fung and Chu Yan,” in Wong Ain-Ling (ed.) (2008).
- 18 Ibid, 193–194.
- 19 Xia Yan (a.k.a. Huang Zibu, Lo Fu, 1900–1995) was a significant figure in the 1930s left-wing cinema movement as well as a highly placed official in the post-1949 cultural

- sector. On Xia's connection with the film as well as the context in which the scripting is anchored, refer to Xia, Yan (1983).
- 20 Wong, Ain-ling (ed.) (2005).
 - 21 Han, Yanli (2005), "National Defence Cinema: A Window on Early Cantonese Cinema and Political Upheaval in Mainland China," in Wong (2005), *The Hong Kong–Guangdong Film Connection*.
 - 22 From 1971 to 1973, Cantonese film production practically dropped to zero. For a closer look at the situation, refer to Li, Cheuk-to (ed.) (1984). See also Kwok, Ching-ling and Shen Biri (eds.) (2010).

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The Documentary Film in Hong Kong

Ian Aitken and Mike Ingham

Introduction

No substantive attempt has yet been made to assess the character, value, and achievements of the Hong Kong documentary film. Our recent study¹ is, therefore, the first to explore this area of cultural expression in a comprehensive manner. The findings of our project are the product of four years full-time, intensively funded research on the subject, and provide a scholarly asset for students, teachers, and academics engaged in Hong Kong studies. During the course of our research every one of these films was viewed and analyzed, many of them for the first time since their original screening.

Convention has it that Hong Kong has produced relatively few documentary films. However, this preconception does not accord with the facts. Our research has uncovered a corpus of thousands of such films, including short series, current affairs series, and over 200 individually authored films. Some of these films are of considerable historical and aesthetic significance, and include the films of the colonial government Hong Kong Film Unit, television documentaries such as *The Hong Kong Case*: a trenchant and poignant film of world-class status made in the harrowing aftermath of the 1989 Tian'anmen Square massacre; and the single-authored cinémarité documentary films of Tammy Cheung. Many of these films are significant from a number of points of view, are also little known, and are, as a consequence of these factors, deserving of greater critical attention than has been their due so far.

Hong Kong documentary film was produced against the backdrop of the historical development of Hong Kong from British Crown Colony to the handover

to China in 1997. In consequence, it explores and portrays this historical tapestry, including the communist-inspired anti-British riots of 1967–8, the problem of the Vietnamese boat people refugees in the early 1980s, the fears expressed over the run-up to the return of sovereignty to China in 1997, and the post-handover context of living within, and only partly distinct from, a totalitarian regime. Hong Kong has never been a fully democratic society, and documentary film-making in Hong Kong is both influenced by and reflects that reality. Hong Kong documentary film also explores the rich cultural and social tapestry of the city and environs, confronting many social problems along the way, including those of gambling, environmental decline, prostitution, and drug addiction. These films similarly illuminate and address many of the intimidating social changes which occurred in the territory, including the huge increase in population, the development of a light manufacturing economy in the 1960s (which made the phrase “made in Hong Kong” an international byword) the changing relationships between the different races in Hong Kong; and the shifting affiliations with Britain and China.

The study began by exploring the early period of documentary film-making in Hong Kong up to 1958, and then turned to the work of the government Hong Kong Film Unit between 1958 and 1969. Following this we charted the development of television documentary film in Hong Kong, from 1970 to the present day, including the role of the public broadcaster: Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK). Moving on to the arena of full-length, stand-alone documentary film we studied the development and achievements of independent filmmakers in Hong Kong, such as Tammy Cheung, Evans Chan, and others. The project, and this chapter, which provides an overview of our research, concludes with an assessment of the contribution and achievement of the Hong Kong documentary film, and the problems and opportunities attendant upon the future relationship to documentary film-making in China and the region.

From Edison to the Cultural Revolution: The Earlier Film Period (1896–1960s)

As early as 1896, the filmmakers of the Thomas Edison Company filmed in the streets of Hong Kong. The existing copy retained by the Hong Kong Film Archive is a compilation of 14 shorts entitled *The Edison Shorts* (1898), including films from both Hong Kong and Shanghai, among which, six were shot in Hong Kong. *The Sikh Artillery* consists of a single faded image recording the force practicing in the gun-battery. *Street Scene in Hong Kong* is a single shot of a street resembling Sheung Wan, in which rickshaws, single-wheel, and double-wheel vehicles and people can be seen bustling along the road against a background of tenement-style buildings. *Hong Kong Wharf Scene* is a still shot of people around the pier, including policemen, coolies, and rickshaw passengers. *Hong Kong Regiment* is divided into two

sections; the first is a still shot of the military marching and the second is a blurred long shot of a section of infantry practicing, all of them equipped with rifles and bayonets. *Government House at Hong Kong* is a wide, still shot of the Governor's residence, with hawkers in the foreground.²

Various European, American, and Japanese filmmakers soon followed the Edison Company's lead. Approximately 20 reels were shot by British, American or French companies before the 1930s, the era of sound cinema. They were shot mainly by Joe Rosenthal from the British Warwick Trading Company and Robert K Bonnie from the American Mutoscope and Biograph Company between the period 1900 and 1901. A group of reels, including *Panorama of Hong Kong Harbour*, *Chinatown Bazaar*, *Chinese Junks in Hong Kong Harbour*, *Queens Road*, *Review of Fourth Goorkhas* were made, and each clip is between 50 and 100 feet long in reel length. The British–French company Urban Eclipse and Britain's Charles Urban Trading Company were also active in filming Hong Kong from 1907 to 1909, during which period longer reels from 300 to 600 feet were filmed. In 1914, a 96-metre travel documentary *La Chine Moderne*, *Hong Kong* was made by Pathé Frères.

Other major developments in the early part of the century include the first locally-produced documentary, *Chinese Competitors at the Sixth Far East Sports Games in Japan* in 1922. This was produced by the Minxin Company and shot by the owner, photographer, and director Lai Man-wai. Lai was inspired by American film entrepreneur Benjamin Brodsky, who produced the first commercially successful films in Hong Kong (possibly as early as 1909 although, as Hong Kong film historians Law Kar and Frank Bren observe, this may be questionable) (2004). Brodsky had collaborated on short travelogue-style documentaries such as *A Trip through China* in 1916, and also worked on film projects with local cameramen, among whom were Lai, his brother and associates.³ Even before Minxin was formed, Lai had been engaged in filming documentaries, and after the establishment of the company in 1922, Minxin became the most important newsreel producer in the crown colony. In most of these reels, Lai Man-wai or his associate Law Wing-cheung would be the cinematographer. A total of 24 films were made in the next five years, before the company went bankrupt due to the 1926 general strike in Guangzhou and Hong Kong. During the first year of Minxin's operations, Lai shot a large number of local scenic movies and records of cultural events. After *Chinese Competitors*, within the same year in 1923, came *Hong Kong Scenery*, *Hong Kong Soccer Match*, *Hong Kong Dragon Boat Race*, and *Hong Kong Police Force Parade*.

Later, Lai became well known for his portrayal of the Chinese Republic leader Dr. Sun Yat-sen, in his work, *A Page of History*, a film which consists of location footage taken by Lai when he followed Sun from 1926 to 1927 on the "Northern Expedition" to vanquish northern Chinese warlords. During the period 1921–1928, Lai and his cinematographers Law Wing-cheung and Pang Nian shot more than 15 films recording and supporting Sun's bid to destroy the power of the warlords and unify the country. While documenting the Guomindang party, Lai was presented by Sun with a commendation written in his own hand with the words "The world

belongs to all.”⁴ The various short films were later edited into the version we now know as *A Page of History*, which was screened in Hong Kong, China, and even overseas in the 1940s after its final edit in 1941.⁵ Unfortunately much of the short film footage was destroyed in a ferry explosion during the Japanese Occupation, although the remaining footage was subsequently re-edited into a 35-minute version, and is still regarded as an important historical document. Two copies of this print of *A Page of History* were partially preserved, one being sent to the Central News Reel and Documentary Film Studio in Beijing, one stored in Lai’s home. The current version kept at the Hong Kong Film Archive has the best image quality, and is an amalgam of the two copies re-edited by Lai Man-wai’s son, Lai Shek.

From 1933 onwards Hong Kong entered the new dimension of sound cinema, and the first sound documentary film was produced in 1934 by Tianyi Film Company. Entitled *The Soccer Clash Between South China and the Infantry*, the film records the highlights of the soccer match between the army team and one of the best known teams in Hong Kong, South China – a team with a long history and one that continues to be among Hong Kong’s top soccer teams. US documentary filmmaker James Fitzpatrick also came to Hong Kong in 1930 to make *Picturesque Hong Kong*, and returned in 1937 to make the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer backed *Hong Kong, The Hub of the Orient*, covering locations such as Repulse Bay and Victoria Peak.⁶

Between the period of the introduction of sound cinema and Japanese Occupation of Hong Kong in December 1941, Tianyi (later Nanyang) and Grandview (Daguan) were the most active companies making documentary films. There is a record of around 20 films being produced in Hong Kong between the start of the Sino Japanese War in July 1937 to the year 1943, when Hong Kong was still under Japanese occupation. Among these films, 18 can be considered as belonging to the genre of anti-Japanese war propaganda films. According to Yu’s film notes, *The War Effort in Guangzhou* (1937)⁷ was a big documentary production by Grandview, and it was also the first film that agitated against the Japanese occupation. It was directed by Lee Man-kwong and Tong Kim-ting, and produced by Joe Chiu Shi-sun, the co-owner of Grandview. The film copy has now disappeared, but according to the Film Archive catalogue, it was made up of 18 segments, showing how “the people of Guangzhou are mobilized towards the war effort, including the organization of machine gun forces, the security force, the fire-fighting brigade, the ambulance brigade, and the general work force.” The film shows Guangzhou during the air attack and “war hero Fang Zhenwu (the grandfather of Hong Kong’s former Chief Secretary Anson Chan) and flying ace Huang Guangqing also appear in the film.”⁸ Grandview was an exceptional Hong Kong film company for the period, because both Chiu and the other founder Moon Kwan Man-ching were educated in California. When the two formed Grandview in 1933, they created the first big film studio in Hong Kong modeled along Hollywood studio lines, raising standards in equipment and technical quality, and eventually becoming the first to make films in color as well as widescreen. *The War Effort in Guangzhou* could be regarded as a prelude to a series

of patriotic films which Chiu produced later (*Shanghai Behind the Lines*, 1938, *Little Guangdong*, 1940, *Song of the Exile*, 1941, and *Little Tiger*, 1941).

In 1938, China Film moved to Hong Kong and left-wing filmmakers including Cai Chusheng, Szeto Wai-man, and Qian Xiaozhang formed Dadi Film Company. *Protecting Siyi* (1938) is a film written and directed by Szeto and edited by Qian, recording how the people from the four counties (*siyi*) in Guangzhou, i.e., Xinhui, Taishan, Kaiping, and Enping, fought the Japanese and protected their home province. In June 1938, with the support of the China War Time Film Research Association, Hong Kong director Lam Tsong went to Yan'an for nine months to shoot the documentary *On the Northwest Frontline*. The film shows various scenes of life in Yan'an, which was the base of anti-Japanese troops during the war. The whole film is divided into eight segments: (1) The activities of Mao Zedong, Lin Biao, and writer Ding Ling; (2) The Anti-Japanese Military University; (3) The Lu Xun Art Academy; (4) The battle strategy of the Eighteenth Corps; (5) The youth of Yan'an; (6) Labor Day festive activities; (7) The New Fourth Army; and (8) The life of people in the "red" territories.

The first record of newsreel production activity in Hong Kong dating from the end of Japanese Occupation in 1945 was *Gala Performance of Movie Stars* (1947). It recorded the annual performance of Cantonese opera artists, including Sit Kwok-sin, Ma Shi-zhen, Wu Chufan, and Bai Jurong. Subsequently, the 1950s saw the emergence of a new cinema experience, with a short newsreel played prior to the screening of the feature film. A record number of 47 reels were made. Topics were mostly leisure-related, such as updates on marriage of celebrities, and celebrity events such as royal activities, exhibitions, performances, and parades and only a few films dealt with matters related to current affairs. However, films were made about the notorious fires in both Kowloon City's Tung Tau Village⁹ in 1951 and Shek Kip Mei in December 1953. The makeshift homes in Shek Kip Mei were mostly inhabited by immigrants from mainland China. *The Great Fire in Shek Kip Mei* (1953) was produced by Union Motion Picture Enterprise and screened before Ng Wui's movie *Father and Son*. Union Motion also organized a charity screening on January 6, 1954 for those affected by the fire, with seven theaters in Hong Kong and Kowloon playing *Father and Son* and their own anniversary documentary *The 1st Anniversary of the Union Film Enterprise Ltd.*

The Art of Chinese Folk Arts (1956) was one of the few larger-scale documentary film productions. It was the first feature-length documentary produced by Great Wall, and captured highlight moments of the 22 performances given by the Chinese Folk Arts Troupe. It was 13 reels long, and was directed by Hu Xiaofeng and Su Chengshou, and shot by Lo Kwan-hung. One year later, Great Wall produced another 11-reel long film with the same title, this time a show in June 1956 at the Empire Theatre in North Point.

Later, during the 1960s so-called "left-wing" (i.e., pro-communist China) studios based in Hong Kong produced a significant number of commercial documentary films, mostly Mandarin language productions, portraying well

known scenic locations, popular acrobatic skills, and the various ethnic tribes within China. For reasons of censorship, these films were unable to promote the ideological imperatives of communist China directly. Instead, they attempted to accomplish this obliquely. Most of the films concerned here were initially contracted by companies based in China, and relevant filmmakers included Lo Kwan-ho, Chen Juan, Fu Chi, Zhang Zheng, and Suen Wah. In 1965, Lo Kwan-ho made an important documentary with, then, great social relevance to Hong Kong: *Water Comes Over the Hills From the East*. This film portrayed how a benevolent China assisted the building of a canal which brought fresh water from China's southern Dongjiang province in order to alleviate the severe drought problems suffered by Hong Kong. This commemorative film is still remembered fondly by older Hong Kong people today, and was one of the only two films of that year with a box office exceeding one million Hong Kong dollars. During the ten days of theatrical release there were full houses for every screening, and black-market film tickets were even sold. Not only was it the first Hong Kong documentary film to achieve box-office revenue of one million, it also broke records as the best-selling film ever up to that point in Hong Kong.

Although this unusual success may have suggested a demand for documentary projects which echoed with social reality and a reflection of the hardships facing Hong Kong people, in fact most of the theatre-released documentaries in the 1970s were about scenic tourist attractions, special acrobatic troupes or ethnic tribes in China. Film companies, including names such as Feng Huang, Sun Leung, and Great Wall (the three later integrated and became Sil-Metropole), were active in producing films until the 1980s. Most of these were travel documentaries encouraging interest in areas of the mainland among a Hong Kong population that was by now beginning to enjoy the fruits of affluence as a result of the city's economic expansion.

The Postwar Period: From Colonial Film-making (The Hong Kong Film Unit, 1958–1969) to TV Documentaries (1970s onwards)

Following the formation in Britain of the Crown and Colonial Film Units as organs for the dissemination of official British films during World War II, official film units were set up in the various Crown colonies until by 1955 around 30 such units had been established. One of these was the Hong Kong Film Unit, which was formed relatively late, in 1958. This first organized documentary film archive in Hong Kong was run by the filmmaking arm of the colonial government, and the data generated by the Film Unit represents a significant resource of materials, consisting of hundreds of films and thousands of pages of written documentary material. Our study of this phase of the development of a Hong Kong documentary practice is largely

based upon analysis of previously unresearched primary documents – handwritten correspondence, newspaper clippings, documents emanating from the British Colonial Office, and of course the films themselves.

A decade after the Japanese Occupation of the colony social conflict had been considerably mitigated, but tension still lingered, and a careful public relations strategy was required in order to address social grievances. Press Relations Officer John Lawrence Murray was given responsibility for developing and projecting a more benign government image. From 1950 onward Murray corresponded frequently with the British Colonial Film Unit with the intention of building a visual department aimed at transmitting government information and policy more clearly and persuasively to the Hong Kong public.

Tom Hodge, then Film Adviser to Singapore's Commission General Office, advised Murray not to employ a group of young directors who would want to produce award-winning documentaries, in preference to making more routine little films. Hodge's advice turned out to be influential, because apart from one award-winning production, which was outsourced, none of the reels or magazine type films made by the Hong Kong Film Unit in the early stage was substantial. Murray conceived of a Film Unit that would consist of three staff members: an expatriate Film Officer who ran the unit, a local film cameraman, and a local stills cameraman who would also be the Public Relation Office's photographer for general purposes. In terms of functions, Murray envisioned that the unit would make information films for the public and act as a censor of commercial films.

Although Governor Sir Alexander Grantham inaugurated the first television service in 1957, the first TV station in Hong Kong, Rediffusion Limited, accommodated only 2,000 well-heeled subscribers. Televisions were unlikely to be viewed by the middle class, let alone people living in the squatter areas or public housing estates. With cinema as the sole distribution outlet in the 1960s, Murray would grasp the opportunity of employing this channel to spread government ideology to the Hong Kong people. His films would be shown in the colony's 68 cinemas, between the commercials, and before the main feature. After 1968, the Film Unit also boasted a mobile film team, showing films in resettlement estates to residents. The Hong Kong Film Unit's significance was attributed to the fact that it presented the first systematically purveyed documentary images to Hong Kong people, and that its films were exhibited in cinemas, which remained the main visual medium outlet throughout the 1960s.

Ambitious as Murray was, he experienced financial setbacks in the early stages of the operation. Despite having sizeable overseas Chinese audiences, these films were still not sufficiently commercially viable to ensure an economic return, unless production costs were kept at a minimum. Hence, most films made were produced on a shoestring budget, and Murray also confessed that "quantity rather than quality was the general trend of Hong Kong production."¹⁰ But before his retirement in 1963, Murray would have the opportunity to oversee one prestigious film project in 1961. Entitled *This is Hong Kong*, this was the first of only a handful

of outsourced productions to a foreign production house in the Film Unit's lifespan. It won numerous awards internationally and was the first Hong Kong-made documentary screened in all British Associate cinemas in London. Written and directed by Noni Wright, a female director and producer from Cathay Film Services, it is the colonial version of *Industrial Britain* (1931), presenting aspects of trade and industrial growth, as well as concerns related to housing problems. *This is Hong Kong* deploys the classical Griersonian formula in documentary films: first of all, montage was placed against a mixture of real footage and re-enacted, staged material, with a narration driven by the authoritative voice-of-God narrator. The ideologically driven narration at the end of the film presents how the "partnership between Britain and Hong Kong has turned Hong Kong from a barren rock to a beautiful and most loved city."¹¹

Half way through the Film Unit's operations in 1965, Brian Salt was hired to take over the position of Film Officer. Though known for his work on animation film and an established director of children's feature films, Salt had no background in documentary filmmaking. His appointment showed how the Hong Kong Film Unit had progressed away from Murray's initial vision, which had been influenced by Hodge, where film output quantity prevailed over quality. While Salt would make general films on Hong Kong, as well as magazine and educational films, he would also introduce new stylistic features in his productions. Documentaries, he believed, were best served spiced with an element of drama. If the objective was to report on Hong Kong's achievements, he would bring fictional characters to life in order to enliven representation. He was fortunate to have Charles Wang as his right-hand director and cinematographer. Wang would later take over his father's company, Salon Films, one of the biggest film companies in Hong Kong. With the Wang family connections to local stars and Hollywood celebrities, as well as lucrative government financial support, the Unit began to forge a role making more popular pieces with a higher production quality.

In Salt's major documentary work, *Report to the Gods* (1967), Cantonese comedian Leung Sing-bor played the fictional Kitchen God, a role based on stereotypical local folklore. The film's somewhat kitsch conceit entailed a highly fictionalized script, commercially stylized images, fast-paced editing, and a soundtrack mixed with Western cabaret show tunes and Chinese instrumental music. Amazingly, the documentary made absolutely no reference at all to any contemporary social or political issues, such as the Hong Kong riots that took place in the year of the film's release, sparked off by the events of the Chinese Cultural Revolution. After directing *Report to the Gods*, Brian Salt went on to make another high-budget historical costume drama starring Nancy Kwan, the leading actress of the popular contemporary fiction film *The World of Suzie Wong*. Something of an idiosyncratic silent film, *The Magic Stone*, portrays the local fisherfolk legend of the Amah Rock, located above Shatin in the New Territories. With this work the Film Unit intended to project a representation of Hong Kong folklore both locally and internationally. Despite the absence of the slightest contemporary relevance in films like *The Magic Stone*, Salt's

work does convey his passion towards Hong Kong and Chinese culture. His films infuse the characteristics of Chinese traditional values, rituals, and festivals with Western modernization, economic progress, and fashionable images into a representation of Hong Kong as a unique city.

Following the demise of the Film Unit, a number of television institutions emerged and, to an extent, took over the role it had vacated. These included Television Broadcasting Limited (TVB), Rediffusion Television (RTV), Asian Television (ATV), and the public broadcaster: Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK). Rediffusion Television (RTV) which started up in the late 1950s had been broadcast on a subscription basis and catered for the more affluent classes with its English language programming, the only official language of Hong Kong at that time. Then in 1967, Television Broadcast Ltd (TVB) launched the first free broadcasting television station in Hong Kong, which popularized the medium for domestic households of all classes. TVB helped promote rapid television penetration and it subsequently became a mass medium by the early 1970s. In order to keep up with the market competition, RTV also reformed itself into a free television service provider in 1973. TVB's Cantonese channel, TVB Jade, has dominated the local scene since its introduction and has secured more than 70 percent of the viewing market, and sometimes as much as 90 percent of prime-time rating share (Ma 1999: 202).

Shortly after the introduction of free-to-air television, the previously flourishing Cantonese language film industry was drastically curtailed. Television households increased from 12.3 percent of the population in 1967 to 90 percent in 1977 and penetration reached 98 percent in the 1980s. The fast-growing industry had, therefore, become a platform for shaping collective cultural identity. The initial establishment of news departments in the two major television stations also helped to focus the audience's attention on local issues. With the development of news departments at TVB and ATV, Hong Kongers were, for the first time, given daily reports about their own city, rather than China, which was what most newspapers were reporting on. The subsequent development from straightforward news reports to weekly news magazine promoted a climate in which social issues and problems were investigated, and hence the questioning of institutions and government. For the first time, audiences were educated about their rights. Moreover, with the restructuring of the Film Unit as Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK), the 1970s proved a pivotal point for Hong Kong in the transmission of socially engaged films that were produced for the local population.

The emergence of RTHK in the 1970s signified a shift in dominant media form, from radio and cinema to television, and a sea-change in delivering news, educational, informational, and documentary films. James Hawthorne, an experienced broadcaster at the BBC, was seconded to the Hong Kong government as Controller of Television in 1970. Hawthorne's task was to establish a television unit following a public broadcaster model, one that resembled the BBC. In 1972, Hawthorne became the first Director of Broadcasting, and RTHK then took over the function

of the Film Unit in making film reels, as well as producing its own, independent news report. Hawthorne also recruited a group of locally born young staff who would be trained at the BBC for six months, among them executive producers Cheung Man-ye, Wong Wa-kei, and Luen Siu-ming. The closing of the Film Unit also meant that more money from the government could now be spent on RTHK's new television unit. The first TV documentary series ever produced was in 1972 and entitled *Home in Hong Kong*. Broadcast once a week for half an hour each episode, it can be regarded as the modification of the Film Unit's *Hong Kong Today*, a ten-minute bi-weekly news magazine projected in cinemas. *Home in Hong Kong* was broadcast predominantly in Chinese, and on a few occasions re-made in an English version. It lasted for around two years, predominantly produced and directed by Wong and Cheung. In 1974, Wong started *Below the Lion Rock*, and Cheung, originally Programme Officer, later took over from Wong and became Executive Producer in 1975.

When the *Common Sense* documentary film series (now *Hong Kong Connections*) was launched by RTHK in the 1970s, the films of this supposedly "independent" unit retained substantial similarities with the films produced by the more directly government-controlled Hong Kong Film Unit. The series high-points included the award-winning *Temple Street* (Dominica Siu, 1982). The initial blueprint for RTHK was to approximate to the BBC in terms of structure and autonomy. However, compromises were made in order to satisfy government expectations for an organization expected to both produce analytical documentary films and promote government policies. This paradoxical designation in the conceptualization and day-to-day operations of RTHK has continued to generate public controversy to the present. Nonetheless, the major achievements of this institution in terms of the films and film series it has produced needs to be acknowledged. One outstanding example of such a series was *Ten Years After* (2008), made ten years after the 1997 handover to China.

In 1989 *The Hong Kong Case*, one of the landmarks of the *Hong Kong Connections* series was broadcast. The documentary was in tune with public sentiment in Hong Kong following the Chinese government's bloody crackdown in Tian'anmen Square on June 4, 1989. This film offered an analytical, expository account of events and the implications for Hong Kong. At the same time the narrative voiceover of executive co-producer Chris Hilton doesn't mince words and refers candidly to the official version of events as "propaganda" and "lies," a sentiment generally echoed by Hong Kong-based interviewees' lawyer, Martin Lee, Leung Chuk-yin (the winning candidate in 2012's restricted-circle election for the Hong Kong Chief Executive post), and political commentator Frank Chin. Having initially presented a summary history of the crown colony, the filmmakers explore the question of confidence and trust both before and after the 1989 events. There is a marked difference in attitude expressed by interviewees before and after the events. In sum, *The Hong Kong Case* makes its own case for documentary significance extremely effectively by adopting a critically independent stance. It is inconceivable that such

a hard-hitting documentary arguing eloquently against assimilation into mainland ideology could be broadcast in present-day Hong Kong.

The 1970s can thus be seen as an important era of documentary film production in Hong Kong, a decade in which TVB, ATV, and RTHK competed to produce better-quality programs. As with the Hong Kong film industry's "New Wave," which started in the same decade, most new television producers engaging in documentary filmmaking had been educated abroad, either in communications or in journalism. While the most influential television stations are the two free-to-air broadcasters, TVB and ATV, the introduction of satellite and cable television since the early 1990s has made the television industry more competitive. The resultant competition has led to cost control in the programs of the free-to-air broadcasters. This has in turn affected production, with the result that documentary film productions from the early 1990s onward have been restricted in terms of resources for research, planning, production, and post-production.

Aesthetics and Radicalism: The Independent Documentary Film in Hong Kong (1970–2008)

The late 1960s represented an important stage in the growth of alternative films in Hong Kong. According to May Fong, curator of i-GENERATIONS, in 2001 approximately 40–50 experimental films were produced between 1966 and 1970. Most copies of these were unfortunately lost. It is now believed that half a dozen filmmakers were making films during this same period (Choi 2003). In addition to John Woo's first experimental film, the 19-minute-long *Dead Knot* made in 1968 – extracts of which featured in Evans Chan's 2004 documentary *The Life and Times of Wu Zhong Xian* – certain other copies of films still exist; these include Law Kar's *Whole Line* (全線) and *Begging for Food* (乞食), and the influential writer Xi Xi's silent short *Milky Way* (銀河系). These short films were mostly shot in 16 mm film.

As Poshek Fu and David Desser (2000) point out, movie business and local productions were largely influenced by the decisions of the distributors and exhibitors, rather than movie producers, in order to secure finance for filmmaking. Vertical integration between the Cantonese film companies and the distributors did not exist, and the result was often formulaic filmmaking with alternative films having very little chance of getting mainstream distribution. While most films were made in 16 mm, a relatively portable and inexpensive substitute to 35 mm, filming was still considered an expensive project for those who had no financial backing. The result of this lack of finance was that films were shot and then often discarded.

In the vanguard of the independent filmmaking scene was filmmaker, critic, and film historian Law Kar, who demonstrated in his own filmmaking that the act of creating these independent projects was itself a manifestation of the desire to create an important counter-discourse to mainstream cinema. For him "professional

filmmaking cannot provide the freedom and conditions for creative workers to pursue their own film direction and, as a result, independent filmmakers should try to use minimal manpower and material resources to pursue freedom of expression" (Law 1970, translated and quoted in Au Yeung 2006). Yet he designated such films "amateur films" instead of employing terms such as "experimental," "independent," or "alternative" (Au Yeung 2006).

The 1970s marked an expansion in the number of filmmakers from a younger generation who had received a westernized education, aspired to modern political ideas, and were nurtured in film societies and literary clubs. The importance of these institutions was both practical and theoretical: the Phoenix Cine Club, for example, offered competitions, regular screenings, equipment rental services, and small-scale filmmaking training. In the late 1970s, Law Kar, Tsui Hark, and Clifford Choi formed the Hong Kong Film Cultural Centre, which offered film appreciation and production classes, with "New Wave" directors Ann Hui, Tsui Hark, and Allen Fong as their associate speakers (Choi 2003). In consequence, the film criticism scene became more vibrant, with most critics and writers mentioned in the 1960s era contributing to the film magazine *Close Up*, and later in 1979, *Film Bi-Weekly*. These film clubs, cinema journals, and literary clubs were defined by Hector Rodriguez as the "film culture field," which spawned a "critical community" that had already "developed a network of protocols, commitments, concepts, and institutions by the late 1960s and 70s" (Rodriguez 2002: 53).

Consequently, more and more filmmakers were able to participate in filmmaking, and using the more affordable Super 8 format. Choi (2003) observes that this technological development meant that cinephiles could afford a complete range of equipment for production, postproduction, and exhibition, including a camera, an editor, a splicer, a viewer, and a projector. Lau Fung-kut was one of the few filmmakers who consistently shot short documentaries which were preserved in VHS format by the Hong Kong Film Archive, with titles such as *Hong Kong's Housing* (香港的住屋, 1973), *Protest* (示威, date not known), *Eighty Seven Gods on the Wall* (壁上八十七神仙) and *Diaries of Five Men* (五人小記, 1973).

Law Kar's contribution to film criticism was followed by his participation in an activist film in 1971, as cameraman and editor. Law and two other cameramen were invited by political activist Mok Chiu-yu to film the Diaoyutai protest organized by the Hong Kong Federation of Students to urge the Chinese government to take action in reclaiming the islands that were historically Chinese territory, yet ceded to Japan in 1895 under the Treaty of Shimonoseki. The islands were officially handed over to Japan by the US in 1970. A group of Hong Kong students and young workers, mostly inspired by Maoist nationalistic ideals, protested about Japan's claims of sovereignty. The film, funded by the Student Union of Hong Kong University, became *Protect Diaoyu Dao Movement*, a black and white silent film shot in 16 mm. It recorded the details of the protest on April 10, 1971, the conflicts between students and policemen, and eventually the arrests of some protestors. The official attitude of the colonial government at the time was that the Maoist-inspired Diaoyutai movement could be translated into an anti-British and

anti-colonial attitude. The 15-minute film was screened in the program under the title, "Changes in Hong Kong Society through Cinema," and was a part of the 12th Hong Kong International Film Festival in 1988. In the program catalogue, critic Stephen Teo commented on its virtues:

Seen today, the footage constitutes celluloid evidence of a students' movement in Hong Kong which directly parallels those popularly seen in the West. Although the movement was largely inspired by the nationalistic features of Mao Zedong-thought... the political thrust of Diaoyutai was also a filtrated mixture of radical sentiments which expressed solidarity with student movements in the Western world opposing the Vietnam War and the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia (Teo 1988:38).

In the early 1980s documentary films began to display increasing variety. Thirty years after the Japanese Occupation, critical historical documentaries became an area of interest to local filmmakers. This movement was pioneered by Edwin Kong, an architecture graduate from the USA, and the CEO of the influential art-cinema distributor and exhibitor, the Edko Group. In 1980 Kong compiled a film based on existing reels accessible to the public from libraries in the USA. As a film buyer for his father while studying in the US, Kong conceived the idea of making a documentary film about World War II from an Asian perspective. Kong's film dealt with how Japan had come to power before World War II, the Japanese wartime occupations, and massacres in China over a period of three years, with particular references to Shanghai, Nanking, Wuhan, Hunan, Henan, Guangxi, and Hong Kong. This background information formed the first half of Kong's film, *Rising Sun*. By presenting a history with a distinct historical angle on world powers, unlike most of the other Chinese productions that focused on the trauma of the war, *Rising Sun* became a box office success, grossing \$9.4 million in a continuous 43-day release, marking a historical record as the top-grossing film of the year. Given its production values in terms of documentary films, Edko Group can be regarded as the first film company to produce non-left-wing films that gained the distinction of general release. While Edwin Kong was getting his films released commercially, though, other filmmakers were creating documentary films independently.

Film historian and critic Stephen Teo was one of the important filmmakers in Hong Kong during this period. He produced four films in Hong Kong and abroad in the 1980s which were selected for film festivals. Teo collaborated with Lo King-wah, another major practitioner of independent filmmaking. According to Teo's own article, published in the special catalogue for Hong Kong International Film Festival, *Changes in Hong Kong Society through Cinema*, their collaboration on the Super 8 film *War of Positions* (1983) was

Hong Kong's first direct-cinema documentary... In *War of Positions*, the camera followed two social workers as they campaigned, and won the 1983 Urban Council elections, the first time that such direct elections had been held on a wide-spread franchise in the territory. The film shows a political process at work and two people participating in the system (Teo 1997).

After their collaboration on *War of Positions*, Teo made *My Filipina* (1984), a 50-minute film shot in Super 8 about the conditions of Filipina domestic helpers in Hong Kong, which was selected as Hong Kong's entry for the Hawaii International Film Festival in 1985.

Augmentation and Heterogeneity: Documentaries of the Last 15 years

Founded in 1993, the annual Independent Film and Video Awards, together with the financial support offered by the Hong Kong Arts Development Council, began to provide a genuine outlet for independent documentary film-making; at the same time the availability and popularity of inexpensive mini DV technology made the production of documentary films more realizable. During the 1990s, a group of experimental and abstract documentary films emerged from this context, made by figures such as Shu Kei, Yau Ching, Anson Mak, and Makin Fung. Previously shunned subjects, such as feminism and homosexuality, were also explored in films such as *Yang and Yin: Gender in Chinese Cinema* (Stanley Kwan, 1996), which presented a survey of 100 years of Chinese cinema focusing on issues of sexuality, including homoerotic imagery in films made since the 1930s and forms of "male bonding" evident within the contemporary Hong Kong action cinema. During this period collectives such as Videopower also appeared, and produced a stream of independent activist documentaries, sometimes with the help of the Hong Kong Arts Development Council and other agencies, while non-profit-making organizations such as Ying E Chi provided new distribution channels for independent filmmakers.

Independent voices within the filmmaking industry also began to open up new avenues for the making of more commercial documentary films, such as *Women's Private Parts* (Barbara Wong, 2000), which was released on the theatrical circuit. Moreover the emergence of a new round of technical innovation, including inexpensive forms of distribution of VCDs and DVDs, and new technology such as mini DV, HDV digital camera, and editing suites in personal computers, allowed documentary filmmakers to make social and political films which were not dependent on theatrical release or expensive exhibition venues.

In terms of a significant body of documentary filmmaking related to Hong Kong, two very distinct independent documentary filmmakers stand out: Evans Chan and Tammy Cheung. Evans Chan is influenced by Bertolt Brecht's epic theater and Jean-Luc Godard's counter-cinema, and most of Chan's films are combinations of dramatic subplots, theatric performances, interviews with political figures, and archive footage of the city of Hong Kong and elsewhere. *Journey to Beijing* (1998) deals with the transfer of sovereignty of Hong Kong to China in

1997, whilst *Adeus Macau* (1999) similarly addresses the handover of Macau to China in 1999. *The Life and Times of Wu Zhong Zian* (2003) is based on a play about Hong Kong-born democracy activist Ng Chung-yin; whilst *Sorceress of the New Piano* (2004) celebrates the transcultural career of Singapore-born, New York-based professional pianist Margaret Leng Tan. Incorporated with vintage footage of Merce Cunningham's dance, Jasper Johns' art-work, and extracts from Marcel Duchamp's 1926 work *Anémic Cinéma*, the latter film is a meditation upon the role and importance of Asian-American women within the musical avant-garde. Chan's latest film: *Datong: The Great Society* (2011), on the 1911 revolution that overthrew the last Chinese dynasty, continues Chan's tendency to employ hybrid and inter-medial devices and methods in his films, particularly drama and dance. This critically acclaimed work follows the lives of Qing Dynasty reformer Kang Youwei and his daughter in China and latterly in Sweden in Chan's signature dialectical style and muses on the possibilities for China had Kang's, and not Sun Yat-sen's, pathway to reform been followed.

Tammy Cheung can be regarded as the first independent filmmaker in Hong Kong to completely devote herself to the documentary film. Influenced by Frederick Wiseman's *cinéma vérité* style, Cheung's non-intrusive films document a Hong Kong that often contrasts sharply with the image of the city in the common, public, or "official" imagination. Good examples of this phenomenon can be seen in many of her films, e.g., *Invisible Women* (1999), in which South-east Asian women immigrants in Hong Kong talk about their lives; *Secondary School* (2002), which chronicles a typical school-day in a top Hong Kong boys' school juxtaposed with a typical school-day in a girls' school; *July* (2004), which focuses upon events on July 1, 2003, when the citizens of Hong Kong took to the streets to protest about the possible introduction of draconian security measures, and *Moving* (2003), which, alongside *Rice Distribution* (2003), depicts the relentless problems of the poor and elderly within the city. By contrast in *Speaking Up* (2005) and *Speaking Up II* (2007) Cheung departs from her usual direct film-making style to adopt a talking-heads interview format, in which ordinary people in Hong Kong and China discuss a range of questions related to politics, society, personal growth, and the role of education. *Election* (2009), which depicts the conflicting political forces at play in Hong Kong – from pro-China to democratic – during the 2004 election campaign, is a major contribution but has not had a commercial release. Regrettably the international standing of Chan's and Cheung's films is not as high as it ought to be, partly because of the difficulties of marketing and distribution and partly because of the current state of independent filmmaking worldwide.

That said, Cheung King-wai (King Cheung), is one contemporary documentarian who has experienced commercial success. He initially came to attention as an important filmmaker through the help of the China–Hong Kong–Taiwan documentary film promotion organization CNEX, which supported his debut

film: *All's Right With the World* (2007), a film which documents the lives and struggles of five families living in poverty during the Lunar New Year in Hong Kong. It was, however, with his second film, *KJ: Music and Life* (2009) that he achieved box office success. Drawing on his expertise in classical music (Cheung is a cellist, with a Master's degree in music) the film portrays a precocious middle-class child pianist prodigy and is set within the middle-class and privileged environment of one of Hong Kong's elite schools. The film, which is incisively but indirectly critical of Hong Kong's "hothouse" education system, ran for nearly a year and became the most commercially successful documentary ever made in Hong Kong.

In complete contrast, in *Homeless FC* (2006) James Leong and Lynn Lee portray a group of eccentric and troubled homeless people who group together in order to form a football team to participate in the Homeless World Cup. With funding from the Singaporean government, the directors here managed to successfully gain exhibition release under the auspices of Tammy Cheung's Chinese Documentary Film Festival: an annual documentary event in Hong Kong. However, the film was not able to obtain a general release, in sharp contrast to *KJ: Music and Life*. Another "indie," *This Darling Life* (Angie Chan, 2008), focuses on the trials and tribulations of dog owners, as their beloved pets become old, and sick. In contrast to these individually crafted works, a documentary such as *Dare Ya!* (Louis Tan, 2002), or a mockumentary such as *Heavenly Kings* (Daniel Wu, 2006), the latter of which draws on the style of the American mockumentary *This is Spinal Tap* (Rob Reiner, 1984), were produced through the joint effort of well-known popular artists, musicians, actors, and producers in Hong Kong, such as the actress Cecilia Yip, and the pop singer Daniel Wu. However, even with the participation of celebrities, these films were only able to gain limited release, and a relatively small amount of box-office revenue.

Quite distinct from these commercially released films, which dealt with the ubiquitous subject matter of animals, children, and pop music, Louisa Wei and Pang Xiaolian's *Storm Under the Sun* (2009) covers artistic repression and injustice in China in literary and cultural movements of the 1950s which had been viciously suppressed by Mao. *Storm Under the Sun* succeeded in being exhibited in venues such as the Hong Kong International Film Festival, and also met with critical praise. Similar non-mainstream documentaries which received exposure in a variety of venues include *Hong Kong UFO Documentary* (Prodip, 2008), which explores UFO sightings in Hong Kong; and *The Decameron* (Denise Ho and Yan Yan Mak, 2009), which explores mental disorders. Both of these films employ a combination of interview format and striking stylization, whilst *One Way Street on a Turntable* (Anson Mak, 2007), and *HK Style* (Mathias Woo, 2006), are more experimental and idiosyncratic in approach. *High/Low* (Jean Louis Schuller and Sam Blair, 2011), in contrast, uses a direct cinema style to focus on the obsession with gambling in Hong Kong and Macau.

Conclusion: the Future of Documentary Film in Hong Kong, China, and the Region

China's continued practice of persecuting intellectuals, artists, and activists is a major obstacle to the growth of a genuine documentary filmmaking culture in the nation. For example, when Tibetan filmmakers Dhondup Wangchen and Golog Jigme shot *Leaving Fear Behind*, in the wake of the 2008 unrest in Tibet, the footage had to be smuggled out of their occupied homeland. Nevertheless, in a country where censorship and surveillance are ubiquitous, and documentary films are controlled by the state television company CCTV – which also has its own centrally managed documentary film-making branch (the Central Newsreel and Documentary Film Studio) – independent filmmakers still manage to explore sensitive political, social, and cultural issues, though often with considerable difficulty. These films are often made under cover, with little or no sources of funding, by dedicated bands of filmmakers networking together. They also make their way into Hong Kong from time to time, and cross-border filmmaking alliances are now being formed.

In addition, since the year 2000, a growing number of independent organizations dedicated to the development of Chinese documentary film have appeared. CNEX is a Taiwan-based organization established in 2007 with the objective of supporting independent filmmaking exchange between China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. Providing that financial funding remains available in the city, that censorship can be avoided, and that exchange and exhibition of films are organized effectively, there are prospects for continued growth and interaction in the domain of independent documentary film between Hong Kong and China; and these prospects are also helped by the distribution efforts of Tammy Cheung's Visible Record company, and by her administration of the annual Chinese Documentary Festival, which showcases documentary films from the mainland, Macao, and Taiwan in Hong Kong. In addition to the Chinese Documentary Festival, Chinese documentary films are also presented in Hong Kong in the Hong Kong International Film Festival in increasing numbers, and an award-winning example of this phenomenon would be *Last Train Home* (2009), by Lixin Fang, a Canadian–Chinese director.

In addition to China, Macao, and Taiwan, there are growing links between Hong Kong documentary filmmakers and independent production companies in regional countries such as Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines. Hong Kong has never had its own elected government, and its political status of restricted autonomy is manifest in many of its television-produced documentary films. Prior to the 1997 handover, such films were usually non-critical of the colonial government and, since the handover in 1997, few programs have been made which criticize China directly. Hong Kong does not have a state-controlled media monopoly, and the two existing television stations and the public broadcaster RTHK benefit from a degree of editorial independence set out in the

Broadcasting Ordinance. However, in practice, self-censorship, and management by embedded elites often operates to maintain the authority and interests of the unelected status quo.

The possibility for reform of the broadcast institutions and television current affairs documentary film provision remains, therefore, in considerable question. Despite this unpropitious context, however, in the past important television documentary films have emerged in response to important historical events, as *The Hong Kong Case* testifies. So there is some limited hope for the future in all of this. In addition other developments beyond television reveal a potentially more hopeful picture. For example, during the 1990s, and as a means of providing support for the declining Hong Kong film industry, the Hong Kong Arts Development Council emerged as a major source of funding for independent documentary film projects, including the works of Tammy Cheung. Together with the transborder work of organizations such as CNEX, Visible Record, and others previously mentioned, this type of support provides a platform of opportunity for current practitioners.

Notes

- 1 Hong Kong Government Research Grants Council Competitive Earmarked Research Grant (CERG) project: Hong Kong Documentary Film, 1976-2009; principal investigator: Ian Aitken; co-investigator: Mike Ingham; senior research assistant: Yvonne Young. The book-length study published by Edinburgh University Press in March 2014 is entitled Hong Kong Documentary Film.
- 2 Entry of The Edison Shorts, from online catalogue of Hong Kong Film Archive.
- 3 Law and Bren (2004).
- 4 From the HKFA online catalogue: This is a documentary of Dr. Sun Yat-sen's effort in building the Republic of China, and how his legacy is carried on by Chiang Kai-shek through the "Northern Expedition." The film is made up of nine segments:
 - 1 Sun Yat-sen's later years
 - 2 Sun Yat-sen's opposition to the warlords and his plan for the "Northern Expedition"
 - 3 The death of Sun Yat-sen
 - 4 Chiang Kai-shek speaking to the troops before they embark on the "Northern Expedition"
 - 5 The KMT Army takes a mass pledge to march north
 - 6 The warlords' stubborn opposition
 - 7 The KMT Army receives support of the people
 - 8 The warlords surrender to the KMT Army
 - 9 Celebration for the success of the "Northern Expedition"
- 5 Yu (1988).
- 6 *Globe*, 2005–2008 and imdb.com.
- 7 Yu Mo-wan translated the film title from 廣州抗戰記 to *The Defense Forces of Guangzhou*. The current title *The War Effort in Guangzhou* is used by Hong Kong Film Archive.
- 8 Hong Kong Film Archive catalogue, information on *The War Effort in Guangzhou*.

- 9 *Documentary on the Fire at Tung Tau Estate, Kowloon City* (1951).
- 10 Murray (1958).
- 11 *This is Hong Kong*, film script, Wright.

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Representations of Law in Hong Kong Cinema

Marco Wan

The law features prominently in Hong Kong cinema: local films often tackle controversial legal subjects, law enforcement agencies and officers form an integral part of plots involving criminals or triads, and narratives revolving around legal trials are so numerous that they arguably form a subgenre worthy of study on their own. When one looks back at the period between the signing of the Joint Declaration between China and Britain in 1984 and the transfer of sovereignty in 1997 alone, one sees a plethora of films related to the law. As a starting point, the period is framed by Johnny Mak Dong-hong's *Long Arm of the Law* (1984) and Joe Ma's *Lawyer, Lawyer* (1997). The films in between these two epoch-defining years range from *The Unwritten Law* (Ng See-yuen, 1985) and its sequels *The Truth* (1988, Taylor Wong Tai-loi) and *The Truth – Final Episode* (Michael Mak Dong-git, 1989) which launched Andy Lau Tak-wah's career, to legally-inflected comedies starring Stephen Chow such as *Justice My Foot!* (Johnnie To, 1992), to the now largely-forgotten films such as Cheung Kin-ting's *Queen's Bench III* (1990) and Chan Dung-chuen's *Law on the Brink* (1994). Legal agents, processes, and institutions form an important part of Hong Kong's filmic imagination. With the benefit of hindsight, this preponderance of films about the law is hardly surprising: the years leading up to the handover were a particularly tumultuous period in the territory's legal history which witnessed such events as the drafting and enactment of the territory's mini-constitution known as the Basic Law, the implementation of a Bill of Rights, the establishment of a new Court of Final Appeal, and arguments about the constitutional status of the Provisional Legislative Council towards the end of British rule, to name but a few. Films, as cultural products both reflecting and shaping aspirations and anxieties about the law, naturally engaged with the legal controversies of the time.

However, while there have been some interesting discussions of representations of law in Hong Kong cinema, they have been infrequent and sporadic at best. This chapter is an attempt to foreground the study of the ways in which the law has been represented in Hong Kong cinema. Specifically, it argues for the analysis of Hong Kong's film texts in relation to the territory's legal history: as cultural products embedded in the legal and cultural environment of their time, Hong Kong films can give historians insight into the territory's legal development at a particular historical juncture. Analyzing these films in the context of legal history can in turn enhance our appreciation of the film texts; their representations of law cease to be purely thematic and can be read as responses to legal debates at the time of their production.¹ The discussion which follows is inspired by scholarship in the burgeoning area of "Law and Film" studies in the legal academy. This is a diverse field which covers, *inter alia*, the jurisprudential dimensions of popular cinema, the use of film as a pedagogical tool in the law school classroom, the study of documentaries related to the law, and the use of films as evidence in the courtroom. However, one common vision amongst the diverse approaches in "Law and Film" studies is the insistence on the systematic and rigorous investigation of the relationship between cinema and the law, whatever form this investigation may take.² This article therefore attempts to bring the study of Hong Kong film into dialogue with a rapidly growing area of legal studies.

Lawyer, Lawyer is a particularly interesting film for the study of the representation of law in Hong Kong cinema. In addition to the year of its appearance – 1997, the year which marked Hong Kong's retrocession to mainland China – it is a film whose engagement with the territory's legal debates was explicitly recognized at the time. Writing in the *South China Morning Post*, film critic Paul Fonoroff (who has a cameo role as the presiding judge in the film) notes that *Lawyer, Lawyer* came out at a moment in Hong Kong's legal history when the new judicial process came under critical scrutiny, and therefore "could be interpreted as an attack on pre-July 1 notions of justice" and as the articulation of "several anti-colonial sentiments" against English law (Fonoroff 1997). The year of the film's appearance and the explicit recognition of a possible interpretation of it as a response to changes in the law at the time of the handover mark out this film as one of particular significance to film critics, legal historians, and cultural-legal scholars.

Bodily Evidence and Legal Time

Lawyer, Lawyer begins in late nineteenth-century Guangzhou, where the audience is introduced to Chan Mong-kut, a man both revered and feared for his intelligence in the local community, and his servant, Foon. The main plot of the story centers on the master-servant relationship: following a quarrel between the two men, Foon leaves Guangzhou to begin a new life in Hong Kong. However he is framed

for murder and is to be brought to trial in the British colony. He names Chan as his defense counsel. When Chan learns that his former servant is in trouble, he rushes to his rescue. Foon's trial takes place in a colonial courtroom in turn-of-the-century-Hong Kong. Unknown to Chan and Foon, the opposing counsel, Ho Chung, is none other than the murderer himself. As the plot develops, we learn that Foon's real name is in fact Nim-sai, and that he is the love-child of Ho Sai, a wealthy businessman and a well-respected member of the local community, and his concubine. Ho Sai is Ho Chung's father. This means that Foon, or Nim-sai, is Ho Chung's half brother. Ho Chung has a reason to rid himself of Foon: without him, Ho Chung would be Ho Sai's only child and would therefore be certain to inherit his father's property. Ho Chung masterminds the murder in an attempt to frame Foon, so as to ensure that Foon would not constitute an obstacle to his inheritance upon Ho Sai's death.

As Fonoroff points out, the film can be understood as a direct critique of English law in Hong Kong. The Caucasian judge in the trial is racist and condescending. He interrupts Chan while he is attempting to explain the motive for the murder; he tells Chan that he is "standing in the court of the Great British Empire, not in one of the provincial courts you have in China." Chan himself is extremely critical of the attitude of the colonialist judge: "This guy is always talking about their 'Great British Empire.' Has he forgotten that Hong Kong is only on loan to Britain? They need to return it, for goodness sake!" Later on in the film, the injustice of the colonial legal system is made explicit when crucial testimony is excluded based on procedural irregularity. When Chan protests, the judge notes: "I'm sorry, the law is the law. Not a word can be changed. Chan Mon-kut, I can't help you." Critics have largely echoed Fonoroff's understanding of the film and have interpreted the trial scene as a critique of the excessive procedural rigidity of colonial law. Lisa Stokes and Michael Hoover have noted that the trial scene can be read as "a send-up of by-the-book interpretations of the law with no regard for justice, reason or practicality" (Stokes and Hoover 1999: 252). In a similar vein, Sin Wai-man and Chu Yiu-wai have argued that *Lawyer, Lawyer* deliberately eschews "the over-determining image of an ideal occidental legal system" and expresses the *vox populi's* "dissatisfaction with the rule of law's (over-emphasis) on procedures" (Sin and Chu 1998: 161–162). This chapter examines the use of the body as a form of legal evidence in the film to argue that while it can indeed be read as an overt denunciation of colonial law, it also responds to the more specific problem of disruptions of legal time in 1997 Hong Kong.

The outcome of the trial turns on a piece of bodily evidence: Foon's bottom. Ho Sai had been told that his son Nim-sai, or Foon, was dead. In order to ascertain the truth of this information, Ho Sai had insisted that the corpse be dug up for inspection. When the corpse was unearthed, Ho Sai was told that the face on the body had decomposed to such an extent as to be unrecognizable. He then instructed for the body to be turned over, and we learn that there is a triangular birthmark on the posterior of the corpse. Nim-sai has an identical birthmark on his buttock. On the basis of this birthmark on the corpse's posterior, Ho Sai concludes that the body does indeed belong to Nim-sai, and is thus convinced that Nim-sai is dead.

However, when he appears in the courtroom as a witness during Foon's trial, he sees Foon standing on the dock and is struck by the uncanny resemblance between Foon and his concubine, an uncanniness expressed by the momentary appearance of the presumably dead concubine in the courtroom. The truth is finally out: Ho Sai finally realizes that Nim-sai is still alive, but the news comes as too much of a shock for him and triggers a heart attack. Ho Sai dies in the courtroom.

One of the most intriguing aspects of *Lawyer, Lawyer* is the prominence of the posterior in the film. When Ho Sai asked for Nim-sai's corpse to be turned over, he said: "What do you see," to which the answer was "His bum." As Chan tries to make sense of the murder, he tells Foon: "the key to the whole thing is your bum." Part of the humor of the film consists in a running joke about the number of objects that can be inserted into Foon's anus: while in prison, Foon is required to place various objects belonging to other inmates into his anus for safe storage. When Chan and his wife examine the birthmark on his buttocks, various objects fall out of it. Towards the end of the film, Foon offers the guard who took care of him a piece of chicken that he had stored in his anus as a thank you present.

The omnipresence of anality in the film is not limited to the use of Foon's posterior as evidence in the courtroom. When Chan and Foon first meet Yu Fa, the girl Foon ends up marrying at the end of the film, they quarrel over whether Chan and Foon sexually harassed her by touching her buttocks. She asks: "Did you guys touch my bum? Did you?": the angry question forms the first sentence she utters to the two men. Foon then offers to make amends by allowing her to touch his own buttock. Moreover, the toilet humor which forms the basis of the film's comic moments can be regarded as a manifestation of the narrative's obsession with anality. For example, at the beginning of the film, Chan outmaneuvers his enemies by giving them laxatives; they are paralyzed by diarrhea and cannot continue their assault on Chan's residence. Later in the trial, Chan's wife draws on a Cantonese metaphor to compare English law to dirty diapers; she notes that if colonial law cannot differentiate between rules and justice, then it is worth less than the fecal matter on a baby's diapers.

The film's thematization of the buttocks is intriguing because it is so insistent. Fonoroff picks up on the film's obsession with the posterior in his op-ed piece in the *SCMP* and argues that it forms one of the film's major weaknesses:

For the most part, witty vulgarity is substituted by witless vulgarity, and the incessant scatological jokes eventually fail to shock. *Lawyer, Lawyer* is one of the most anally retentive movies ever to hit the screens, with chicken legs, dominos, rings, and any manner of objects inserted into a certain body part. One shakes one's head in disbelief, but after a while the antics become as annoying as obnoxious children at play (Fonoroff 1997).

He concludes that if the actor Stephen Chow "is to remain king of the comedy box office, he will need stronger material" than such anally-inspired jokes. Fonoroff's article seems to say too much and too little at the same time: on the one hand, it

hones in on what is most distinctive or unique about the film's representation of law and detects some kind of significance to its focus on the body. On the other hand, he reflects insufficiently on this representation of anality and dismisses it as tasteless and childish humor. The film's unrelenting insistence on the anus, both as a piece of legal evidence in the trial and as a presence in the plot more generally, suggests that the question of the body merits further analysis. Why is the film so obsessed with anality, and how can we think about this peculiar aspect of the film in relation to the particular moment in Hong Kong's legal history in which it appeared?

One point of entry into the question of the representation of anality in *Lawyer*, *Lawyer* and its relation to the film's legal-historical framework can be made via Lee Edelman's notion of "(be)hindsight" in his seminal essay on the spectacle of gay male sex (Edelman 1991). This is because the body's posterior, as it is represented in Ma's film, is inextricably linked to the act of sodomy. The scene of anal penetration hovers just beneath the film's surface. After Foon is arrested, he goes over with Chan the events which occurred at the Hong Kong Club, the scene of the crime, on the day of the murder. Foon remembers that someone blindfolded him and then pulled his trousers off. The incident forms the basis of a comical exchange between the two men arising from an initial misunderstanding of what happened:

Chan (in shock): SO WERE YOU...?
 Foon: Yes.
 Chan: Did it hurt?
 Foon: No.
 Chan: Was it good?
 Foon: Not particularly. Someone took my pants off and saw my bum. I felt this cool breeze and that was about it.
 Chan: Ohhh...

In order to convince Ho Sai to appear in court, Chan asks his apprentice to deliver to him a drawing of a man with his anus prominently displayed on the page. Chan refuses to answer his apprentice's question about the meaning of the drawing. Instead, he asks him: "are you excited?", and the apprentice nods sheepishly, suggesting an undercurrent of homoeroticism at least amongst some of the characters in the film. Finally, Chan tries to counter the accusation of murder against Foon during the trial by arguing that the victim "may have lusted after Foon's anus while he was alive, and then committed suicide out of frustration" when Foon did not respond to his advances. Anality in the film is intertwined with sodomy. While the corpus of texts which Edelman discusses – Sigmund Freud's analysis of the Wolfman in *From the History of an Infantile Neurosis*, John Cleland's *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, Tobias Smollett's *Adventures of Peregrine Pickle*, and Jacques Derrida's *The Post Card* – may at first glance seem far from the world of Hong Kong cinema, his productively wide selection of texts and his emphasis on the

representation of gay male sex in the cultural domain more generally encourages the reader of Edelman's essay to think about the implications of his analysis beyond the four immediate texts that he addresses.

Edelman posits that the logic of (be)hindsight is underpinned by the structure of the metalepsis, or "the rhetorical substitution of cause for effect and effect for cause, *a substitution that disturbs the relationship of early and late, or before and behind*" (Edelman 1991: 96; added emphasis). In other words, it constitutes a two-fold disruption of the binary logic with which we organize the world around us, spatial and temporal. Edelman notes that the anus, as figured in the scene of sodomy, becomes part of a structure which disrupts the notion of space or positions because it is an element of a scene in which the sexual act which is conventionally defined as happening from the front takes place from behind, so that notions of front and back, before and behind, become challenged. It therefore constitutes a "disorientation of positionality" (Edelman 1991: 103). More significantly, it disrupts the conventional logic of time because (be)hindsight, like much of psychoanalytic reasoning itself in the form *Nachträglichkeit*, "refuses any unidirectional understanding of the temporality of psychic development" and "questions the logic of the chronological" (Edelman 1991: 96). It is therefore also a "disarticulation of temporal logic" in which our conception of linear temporality based on oppositional terms such as "prior" and "post" or "before" and "after" is thrown into question. The male posterior is problematically represented in a variety of discourses because the scene of sodomy of which it forms an integral part challenges both our conceptions of space and time, and hence represents "a crisis of certainty, a destabilizing of the foundational logic on which knowledge as such depends" (Edelman 1991: 97).

Film scholar Audrey Yue first noted the significance of Edelman's notion for the understanding of Hong Kong cinema. She argues that the disturbance to spatial and temporal logic which underpins the concept of (be)hindsight "resonates with Hong Kong's identity crisis during the transitional years leading up to the handover" (Yue 2000: 364). Yue's point is worth quoting in full:

The signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration in 1984, which authorized Hong Kong's return to China, produced 1997 as a form of consciousness which anticipated loss, separation, and reunification. But the direction forward was also a movement back to where it had already been: as a British colony in cessation, Hong Kong was to be reunited with China, its "motherland." 1997 was thus marked as a turning point involving a paradox of time and space: the movement towards this moment finds itself on the other side (post-), but at the same point that it was before (pre-) (Yue 2000: 364).

In other words, the transitional years were marked by a disruption of time; the temporal axis which normally forms a crucial part of conceptions of identity was reshaped by the impending return to a past which was yet to come in the future. At its core, "Hong Kong's identity crisis [...] was marked by its inability to

distinguish the ‘pre-’ from the ‘post,’ or the front from the back”: precisely the disruption of binary logic characterized by Edelman’s notion of (be)hindsight (Yue 2000: 365).

Yue’s analysis is mainly focused on films produced in the late 1980s, but its deployment of Edelman’s notion as a means of thinking about Hong Kong cinema can be extended to encompass the question of the representation of the law and legal evidence in *Lawyer, Lawyer* (Abbas 1997; Marchetti 2007).³ This is because the historical moment at which *Lawyer, Lawyer* appeared can be said to be marked by a disruption of time in the legal realm in Hong Kong. This disruption is epitomized by the comments of Audrey Eu, the Chairman of Hong Kong’s Bar Association at the time of the handover in 1997 (and who bears no relation to the film scholar above whose name is pronounced the same way). Commenting on a legal judgment on the ability of the local courts to question the decisions of the National People’s Congress, she criticized the Chief Judge for adopting a “backward-looking” interpretation of the law and argued that his approach had been insufficiently “forward-looking” (Li 1997). Eu argued that the court reached its decision “by a backward-looking process of considering Hong Kong under the colonial rule” – that is, a process of *pre*-handover reasoning – even when territory’s new mini-Constitution allowed it to lay the foundations for a new conception of the relationship between Hong Kong’s law courts and their sovereign – a forward-looking judgment made possible by the *post*-handover state of affairs. Eu’s contention is that the pre-handover reasoning is wrongly positioned; as an understanding of the law from the past it has no place in judgments which would be binding on post-handover Hong Kong in the future.

It is necessary to probe deeper into the legal-historical context in which the film appeared. Eu’s comments are symptomatic of the temporal disruptions at the time of the handover, a reflection of the subversion of the notions of “front” and “back,” before and after in the legal realm. What, then, constituted such disruptions in that period? There were two major legal controversies symptomatic of such disruptions at the time of the film’s appearance in 1997: they concerned the validity of laws enacted or adopted before 1st July, 1997 in post-handover Hong Kong, and the problem of retroactive laws immediate after the handover. Both of these controversies reflected the ways in which the law addressed the difficult question of time at a point where Hong Kong was moving back to the future, from the past of being a British colony and towards a future of reunification to the country it was once part of.

The question of the validity of pre-handover laws in post-handover Hong Kong arose in the unlikely context of trial over a conspiracy to pervert the course of public justice; the defense lawyers argued that their clients could not be tried because the charges against them had ceased to exist from the moment Hong Kong ceased to be a British colony (Parsons 1997a). There were two issues at stake: first of all, it was argued that the Provisional Legislative Council, the legislative body which was formed as a result of the breakdown of talks between Britain and

China, was not a legally valid body. This would mean that the Reunification Ordinance, which provided for the continuation of pre-handover laws in post-handover Hong Kong, was not passed by a legitimate body and would have no effect. The result would be that in the immediate post-handover period, Hong Kong would become a bizarre lawless zone in which the laws which existed prior to the handover would cease to have effect. As one lawyer argued in the Court of First Instance at the time, "there is no common law in existence within the Special Administrative Region" (Parsons 1997b). Second, it was argued that even if the Provisional Legislative Council was to be regarded as a legally legitimate body, it had failed to explicitly adopt the pre-handover laws and so the laws still ceased to be operative after the transfer of sovereignty. According to this argument, the use of the word "shall" in the part of the Basic Law which states that the common law "shall be maintained" in Hong Kong implied the need for a formal adoption of pre-existing laws which ruled out the possibility of their automatic continuation from July 1, 1997 (Parsons 1997c). The legal debate generated widespread anxiety, because on it hinged the very existence of much of Hong Kong law. As Daniel Fung, the Solicitor General at the time of the handover noted, the court case could open up a "legal vacuum," a bottomless abyss into which the entirety of the judicial edifice could fall (Parsons 1997d). Patrick Chan, the Chief Judge who ruled on the case in the Court of Appeal, echoed Fung's sentiment when he noted that "even one moment of legal vacuum would lead to chaos" (Buddle 1997a). Underlying the questions about the legality of the provisional legislative body and the need for the formal adoption of the pre-handover law is anxiety about the temporal disturbance within the law which had been created by the retrocession: what was at stake was the question of whether the past, in the form of pre-handover laws, which have a presence in the legal system of the future, that is, of post-handover Hong Kong, a question which threatened to destabilize the binary opposition of "pre-" and "post-," past and future in the law. This destabilization of temporary categories received more explicit articulation when Fung noted that a court ruling against the legality of the Provisional Legislative Council would result in "an absurdity" whereby the court's decision to make the legislative body a nullity would itself become void, but if the court itself became a nullity then its ruling against the body would cease to exist and hence make the Provisional Legislative Council a legally valid entity again. He described the scenario as a "chicken and egg situation." Fung's metaphor is a telling one for it underscores the temporal disturbance characteristic of the logic of (be)hindsight: a "chicken and egg situation" is one in which it is impossible to differentiate between the beginning and the ending; it therefore has the structure of a Mobius loop central to Edelman's analysis, a structure "whose front and back are never completely distinguishable as such" and which "represents and enacts a troubling resistance to the binary logic of before and behind" (Edelman 1991: 105). The debate about the continued presence of laws from the colonial period in the Special Administrative Region was indicative of, and indeed driven by, a profound problematization of time brought

about by the retrocession. In light of the situation, is perhaps not surprising that Kevin Egan, one of the defense lawyers involved in the corruption case, called the situation a “preposterous” one (Buddle 1997b). As Edelman and Yue both point out, “preposterous” originally meant “inverted” or “placed in the wrong order” (*prae* = before, *posterus* = later). Egan’s comment arguably expresses the temporal conundrum of the law at the time, though he may not have been directly aware of the word’s etymology.

The second legal problem Hong Kong was faced with concerned the potential retroactive effect of its laws. The problem arose because a gap of several hours was to be opened up between the transfer of sovereignty from Britain to China at the stroke of midnight on 1 July 1997, and the reconfirmation of laws at the first meeting of the Provisional Legislative Council several hours after the handover ceremony. Without such reconfirmation, the laws cannot be deemed to have come into effect. This created a curious situation in which those few hours between China’s resumption of sovereignty and the first meeting of the Provisional Legislative Council fell outside the reach of the laws which were yet to be reconfirmed at the legislative body’s first meeting. In order for these laws to have effect during that time window, they had to be given retroactive effect, meaning that they would be operative backwards in time, prior to the moment of their reconfirmation. Of particular controversy were laws relating to public order: technically, people who choose to protest against the mainland Chinese or Hong Kong government during that time gap could not be prosecuted for disturbance to public order because the laws under which they would be prosecuted would not yet have come into effect. Retroactivity is a concept “generally held to be alien to the common law”; the law is only supposed to apply forward temporally (“*No Going Back*”, 1997). However, the Hong Kong government tried to argue that laws passed at the first meeting of the Provisional Legislative Council could be operative against the current of time. Elsie Leung, the Secretary for Justice at the time of the handover, noted that “if someone deliberately makes use of the few hours of legal vacuum, I don’t think they should complain about the law having retroactive effect” (Choy 1997). Many people disagreed with her view. The *South China Morning Post* noted in its editorial that “it would be a breach of legal principle of arrest and prosecute people for undertaking an act which was not illegal at the time it was committed, even though that act would become illegal later that same night.” (“*No Going Back*”, 1997) It cautioned against such a policy of “retroactive retribution.” A law lecturer at the University of Hong Kong adopted a similar position when he noted that “as far as the Basic Law is concerned, if they [the Provisional Legislative Council] pass that law at 3am, then at best it is valid at 3am. It cannot be a minute earlier.” (Choy 1997) On one level, the debate over the retroactive applicability of certain laws in post-handover Hong Kong concerns the question of the rule of law. On another level, however, it can be read as a symptom of anxieties over temporal disarticulations brought about by the handover: the application of future, as-yet-unenacted laws to one’s past behavior

constitutes a collapse of oppositional temporal categories; the linear order of “before” and “after” becomes interrupted in that those legal rules which exist on one side of the temporal divide separating the first meeting of the Provisional Legislative Council from the period immediately before that meeting now exist on the other side; the future exists in the past and disrupts the distinction between past and future.

The significance of *Lawyer Lawyer*’s insistent thematization of the body’s posterior begins to emerge when the film is read against the disruptions of legal time in Hong Kong at the moment of its appearance in 1997. The film’s obsession with the anus, and especially the prominent place it gives that body part as a form of legal evidence in the courtroom, can be understood as a response to the temporal disturbance in the law at the time. The most intriguing aspect of the posterior in the film is that it is used as evidence for ascertaining the identity of Foon, or Nim-sai. When Ho Sai attempts to establish the true identity of the corpse, he does so based on the birthmark found on the buttock of the body; he believes that Nim-sai really is dead because the corpse has the same birthmark on the cheek of its anus. He makes explicit the basis of his reasoning when he is cross-examined by Chan in court:

- Chan: Did you and your concubine have a child?
 Ho Sai: I have a son called Nim-sai...but he is dead!
 [...]
 Chan: How do you know he is dead?
 Ho Sai: We saw the corpse...
 Chan: But you haven’t seen him in twenty years! Did you recognize your son?
 Ho Sai: We saw the corpse’s buttock.
 Chan: Buttock...?
 Ho Sai: Yes. There was a triangular birthmark on the right buttock, so that must have been him.

Ho Sai thinks Nim-sai is dead because he saw the corpse’s behind. His method of establishing identity can be read as a literalization of the logic of (be)hindsight: the usual method of identifying someone is by looking at that person’s face; social conventions dictate that our face is the part of the body we show the world, and that the “front” is the side with which we establish relations with the people around us. In *Lawyer, Lawyer*, however, Ho Sai attempts to establish his son’s identity by looking at the body’s posterior; the “back” or the “behind” is the side that is used for the ascertainment of identity. In other words, Ho Sai’s method of establishing his son’s identity places at the forefront a body part which ought to be placed at the back, while relegating the body part which ought to be displayed prominently at the front – the face – to the back, because the corpse’s face had decomposed to such an extent that it could not be relied upon for the purposes of identification. What ought to be foregrounded is therefore placed in the back, and what ought to be placed in the back is now in the front. Such a disruption to the logic of “before” and “behind,” “anterior” and “posterior” in the establishment of identity in the

film can be interpreted as a reflection of the crisis of identity which Yue discusses, a crisis marked by the “inability to distinguish ‘pre-’ from the ‘post-,’ the front from the back” and which “constitutes modern Hong Kong’s foundational logic,” a crisis underpinned by the logic of (be)hindsight (Yue 2000: 372–373).

However, Ho Sai’s use of the posterior as evidence for identifying Nim-sai turns out to be misguided because, of course, it leads to a case of mistaken identity: the birthmark on the buttock of the corpse is fake, and he reaches the wrong conclusion. The mistake comes to light in the courtroom: as he approaches the witness stand, he sees Foon standing in the dock, and is struck by the resemblance between the defendant and his concubine. The surprise is underscored by the cinematography: Ho Sai’s movements are shown in slow motion as he ponders over the resemblance, and the camera zooms in on Foon’s face as the truth dawns on the witness. Ho Sai is so dumbfounded that he cannot complete the oath on the witness stand; he places his hand on the Bible but is unable to speak because he cannot help but stare at Foon.

It is thus the front side of the body which finally allows the truth to come to light: it is upon seeing Foon’s face in the courtroom that Ho Sai correctly identifies him as his long-lost son Nim-sai. When asked whether he had seen Foon before, Ho says: “No, but he looks a lot like Yu-fa, my concubine.” Privileging the face leads to the reunion of father and son; privileging the backside leads to a case of mistaken identity. Indeed, the reliance on the anus as legal evidence can lead to death: when Foon drops his trousers in the courtroom to prove to Ho Sai that he, too, has the birthmark, Ho-sai is so overwhelmed by knowledge that his son is still alive that he suffers a heart attack and dies. The trial scene in the film therefore seems to suggest that one should not adopt a logic of (be)hindsight when it comes to matters of law: injustice comes about when what ought to be in the back is placed at the front, and when what ought to be in the front is relegated to the back. It is only when we follow the conventional method of identification by privileging the face and placing the posterior where it belongs that we can prevent the villain Ho Chung from usurping the family fortune. In the context of the legal events taking place in Hong Kong in 1997, the film at first glance seems to lend itself to a reading as a critique of the temporal disruptions plaguing Hong Kong law at the time of the handover. In other words, the fact that Foon’s true identity as Nim-sai is only established when the frontal logic is restored and when the fake birthmark on the corpse’s behind is dismissed as unreliable evidence in the trial seems to suggest that the best way forward for Hong Kong would be for the law to get its temporal settings in order; a legal system with its time out of joint would only lead to further problems and disruptions for the territory after the transfer of sovereignty.

However, such a reading of the film as a critique of the temporal disturbances in the law is problematic because despite the revelation of the truth, Foon is still put to death. The outcome of the trial turns on a procedural technicality: even though Ho Sai had admitted that Foon is his son, his testimony cannot be admitted because he had failed to take the requisite oath before identifying Foon; Ho Chung

reminds Chan that “Ho Sai’s hand was on the Bible, but he had not yet spoken the words of the oath.” He then argues that the jury should treat the testimony in such a way “as if the words had not been spoken at all.” Since Ho Sai’s testimony is discounted, Chan ends up with insufficient evidence to convince the jury of Foon’s innocence. Foon is convicted of murder and is sentenced to death by hanging.

The revelation of the truth through the restoration of frontal logic, in the form of Ho Sai’s recognition of Foon’s face and the dismissal of the fake birthmark on the buttock of the corpse as evidence, ultimately does not lead to justice; Chan fails to save Foon in the courtroom. It is therefore problematic to read the film as a straightforward critique of the logic of (be)hindsight; the sight of the front side of the body does not guarantee justice. It is also necessary to think harder about how the film responds to the temporal disruptions in Hong Kong’s legal history. The following section will move from the trial scene to the scene of the sentence. It posits that rather than functioning as a straightforward critique of the law’s temporal dimensions, the film more subtly suggests how the law can capitalize on the logic of (be)hindsight to ensure a just outcome. At such a time of political transition as the restoration of a territory to its former sovereign, temporal disruptions in the legal realm may be inevitable. The film can be read as a comment on how one can operate within the temporal turbulence of the law at this point in Hong Kong’s legal history.

The Temporality of Legal Precedent

Foon is sentenced to death by hanging. The scene of the sentence, or the execution scene, forms the narrative climax of the film. There is a moment of dramatic tension as a guard places the rope around Foon’s neck. We also see Chan’s apprentice crying and Chan’s wife standing in silence and shock at the edge of the screen. All seems lost for Foon, but Chan manages to save his life at the eleventh hour. Depending on one’s point of view, Chan’s legal argument which saves his servant is either ingenious or perverse. His argument is as follows: the Chinese term for death by hanging is “*wuan sao ji ying*,” (環首之刑), which literally means “a sentence whereby a hoop is placed around one’s neck” (*wuan* (環) = hoop or circle, *sao* (首) = neck, *ji* (之) = of, *ying* (刑) = punishment or penalty). Chan argues that since the rope had already been placed around Foon’s neck, the sentence had already been carried out to the full according to the strict letter of the sentence; nothing in the expression “*wuan sao ji ying*” (環首之刑) stipulates that the hoop needs to be tightened. Chan draws a distinction between “*wuan sao ji ying*” (環首之刑) and “*wuan sao sei ying*” (環首死刑), a formulation that would have made the requirement of the defendant’s death explicit. Since the sentence had already been carried out to the full, there was nothing left for the judge to do but to release Foon.

Chan's argument hinges on the precise wording of the sentence. It is a powerful mode of legal reasoning because it turns the judge's vision of the law against him. In the trial scene, the judge had insisted that Chan must adhere to the strict letter of the law; it was for this reason that Ho Sai's testimony was dismissed. In the execution scene, Chan appropriates the judge's legal reasoning for his own use by insisting on the distinction between "*wuan sao ji ying*" (環首之刑) and "*wuan sao sei ying*" (環首死刑). He also appropriates the judge's language by adopting his sentence structure: just as the judge had said that he couldn't help Chan with his case because one must stick to the letter of the law, Chan here tells the judge that 'the law is the law, and not a single word or punctuation can be changed' so Foon must be set free. Moreover, just as the judge had asked Chan not to bring shame on his Chinese compatriots during the trial, Chan here warns the judge not to pronounce a judgment arbitrarily lest he "bring shame on his 'Great British Empire'." Chan's appropriation of the judge's language can be interpreted as a postcolonial strategy of resistance, through which he learns the colonizer's language in order to curse him with it.

The scene's engagement with the question of legal temporality begins to surface when one thinks about the genesis of Chan's interpretative strategy. How did Chan come up with the idea of turning the judge's own reasoning against the colonial legal system? As Foon is led up to the execution stand, the camera cuts to the stairwell where Chan was standing; the camera zooms in on his hand and we see him drumming his fingers against the banister as he ponders over how he could save his servant. The scene on the stairwell shows that Chan gave careful thought to his argument, and that he did not come up with it at the spur of the moment before the final execution order was given. Given that Chan's argument is based on an ingeniously or perversely literal mode of interpretation, one point of entry into the question is to think about where else in the Law and Humanities canon one may find such a mode of interpretation. Indeed, Chan's peculiar way of reading the sentence for murder in the Qing Penal Code in the film is arguably reminiscent of the most famous scene of interpretation in Law and Humanities: the trial scene in William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*. In that scene, the merchant Antonio had signed a bond promising Shylock the Jew a pound of his flesh should he not be able to repay the three thousand ducats which Shylock lends him. Antonio borrows the money from Shylock in order to enable Bassanio to raise enough capital to woo Portia. In Act IV of the play, Portia appears in the courtroom disguised as Balthazar, a learned doctor from Rome. Shylock insists on adhering to the strict letter of the bond: it entitles him to a pound of Antonio's flesh and therefore he would take a pound of flesh from him. Portia turns Shylock's literal interpretation of the terms of the bond against him by stating that while he was entitled to take a pound of Antonio's flesh, he would have to perform the impossible task of cutting exactly one pound of flesh without the assistance of scales for weighing the flesh, and of cutting the flesh without drawing any blood. Portia defeats Shylock's claim by adhering even more closely to the strict letter of the bond than he does.

There are several structural parallels between Portia's argument and Chan's interpretative strategy: both Chan and Portia insist on an absolute fidelity to the letter of the law, the scene of interpretation forms the climax in both sets of narrative, and both Chan and Portia ruthlessly turn their opponent's reasoning into a weapon against them. Beyond these structural parallels, there is a scene in the film which makes explicit the relevance of Shakespeare to *Lawyer, Lawyer*. In the penultimate scene, Foon tells Chan that he has sent his wife to England to study English literature:

- Chan: Really? What is she studying?
 Foon: English literature.
 Chan: Ah right, as in Shakespeare...
 Foon: Yes! Wow you're good, you even know Shakespeare?
 Chan: The study of Shakespeare is suitable for her. Yes, you can ask me anything about Shakespeare...

The scene then fades into another one, and as it does we see Chan continuing to expound upon Shakespeare. The reference to the playwright at first seems incongruous with the rest of the film, but when one thinks about the reference to Shakespeare in relation to the execution scene then its significance becomes apparent: the penultimate scene shows that Chan is an expert on the works of Shakespeare and is thus likely to have known about *The Merchant of Venice*. The case of Portia v Shylock can be said to be a precedent case on which Chan relies when formulating his argument in front of the judge.⁴

Chan's use of *The Merchant of Venice* as a precedent case has important temporal implications. To cite a play from the Renaissance in late nineteenth-century Hong Kong is in effect to bring a case from the distant past into the present; the common law doctrine of precedent is based on the notion that current legal decisions should be guided by relevant cases from the past (Goldstein 1987; Duxbury 2008).⁵ However, the temporal dynamic at work is not a straightforwardly linear one, for decisions in cases are made with an eye to the future. As Portia notes, the right decision must be reached in Shylock's case because "'Twill be recorded for a precedent," and if wrongly decided "many an error by the same example/Will rush into the state."⁶ In other words, a case that is wrongly decided now will affect judgments which are yet to come. The doctrine of precedent is premised on the assumption that cases from the past guide and can determine the outcome not only of those cases to be decided at the present time, but also of those to arise in the future. It would therefore not be an overstatement to say that the doctrine of precedent can be seen as a mode of reasoning which is underpinned by the structure of (be)hindsight: the judge or lawyer looks to the past in order to determine the outcome of the cases of the future. The future, in the sense of the outcome of cases which have not yet come about, is already in the past. The past, in the form of previous decisions, are already in the future; judges often acknowledge,

as Portia does, that when a decision becomes part of the accumulated body of judgments from the past it will always potentially reappear in a future court case. The future is guided and determined by the past and the past is always already imagined to be in the future: the temporal dynamic of the doctrine of precedent can be said to conflate the “before” and “after,” the “front” and the “back.” In an incisive critique of the Court of Appeal’s decision on the case about the conspiracy to pervert the course of public justice discussed above, legal scholar Johannes Chan laments that the judgment “will haunt our legal system for a considerable period and will have far-reaching consequences” (Chan 1997: 387; Chen 1997).⁷ His comment captures the temporal dynamic of the common law: the past decision will always be in the future as a ghostly presence, past and future become mutually imbricated and the traditional conceptual divisions between them loose their hold. A further comment on the temporality of the law can be found in Shoshana Felman’s work on historic trials. She posits that the logic of legal precedent be interpreted as a form of traumatic repetition, such that “legal memory is constituted [...] by a forgotten chain of cultural wounds and by compulsive or unconscious legal repetitions of traumatic, wounding legal cases” (Felman 2002: 57). Trauma also represents a disruption of the linear conception of time, as the past repeats itself in the present and victims of trauma need to work backwards in order to understand the cause of their symptoms. Felman’s identification of the traumatic framework of the law can thus be understood as an implicit recognition of the temporal disturbance which characterizes the doctrine of precedent. The temporal structure of the law has never been a linear one, and it took a momentous legal-political event such as the retrocession of Hong Kong from Britain to China to bring out the questions of time in the law. Chan’s use of the case of Portia v Shylock from *The Merchant of Venice* as a precedent case underscores the temporal dynamic at work in the common law: Foon’s future lies in a case from the distant past of the Renaissance, while the case itself was formulated with an understanding that it would be cited in the future. In the encounter of Ma’s Hong Kong film and Shakespeare’s play, we witness the disruption of temporal positioning which is inherent in the common law.

Following the scene of the execution, the court reconvenes to decide on Chan’s literal interpretation of the law. In the same courtroom in which Foon was first sentenced to death, the judge now reverses the decision: “The final decision of the court is that the sentence has already been fully carried out. Foon can now regain his freedom.” Amidst the cheering of Foon and his supporters, the guards close in on Ho Chung and tell him that he is to be tried for attempted murder. The murderer will get the punishment he deserves and the innocent man is set free. Ultimately, it is Chan’s use of the precedent case of Portia v Shylock from Shakespeare’s play which leads to a just outcome. The disruption of the linear structure of time, together with the questioning of terms like “before” and “after” which enable this linear structure, does therefore not necessarily always lead to turmoil. Through his deployment of a past case, Chan’s capitalizes on the complex temporal modes of the doctrine of precedent to save Foon. Rather than functioning

as a critique of the temporal disruption in the law associated with the retrocession, *Lawyer, Lawyer* can be read as positing a positive deployment of the notion of (be) hindsight. Disturbances in legal time may be inevitable as Hong Kong transforms from a British colony to a Special Administrative Region of China, but the Hong Kong lawyer does not need to fear them. Instead, he can embrace the logic of (be) hindsight, of temporal and positional scrambling, that is part and parcel of the law in this period of change in Hong Kong's legal history, and through his ingenuity turn it to his advantage. Through Chan, the film seems to suggest that the Hong Kong lawyer can embrace the temporal disturbances in the law in a way which ensures that justice is done even in a time of political, legal, and temporal uncertainty.

Notes

- 1 For a further instance of this approach to law and film in Hong Kong, see Wan, Marco (2010).
- 2 For a sense of the diverse approaches within this area, see Creekmur and Sidel (eds.) (2007); MacNeil (2007); Connor (2008) and (2009); Goodrich (2009); Greenfield, Osborn and Robson (2010); Young (2010); and Sherwin (2011).
- 3 For further discussions of the concept of time in Hong Kong cinema, see Ackbar Abbas's notion of the *déjà disparu* in Abbas (1997); and Marchetti (2007).
- 4 For a more detailed discussion of the place of *The Merchant of Venice* as legal precedent in the film, see Wan (2012).
- 5 For further discussions of the doctrine of precedent, see Duxbury (2008).
- 6 Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*.
- 7 Chan (1997). For an argument supporting the Court of Appeal's decision, see Chen (1997) in the same issue of the HKLJ.

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Commentary

Cinema and the Cultural Politics of Identity: Hong Kong No More? A Commentary on the Verge of Postcolonial Locality

Stephen Ching-kiu Chan

During the last three decades, contemporary forms of locality took shape in face of the dominant mode of social imagination which has by phase come to reconstitute moments of the Hong Kong myth under the emergent logic of the neo-imperialist (post-Hollywood) global order. As the production of modernity has entered its late capitalist phase since the mid 1970s, people and communities bound in specific *locality* have had to cope with the new dynamic of identity formation in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR). It would be pertinent to ask: What cultural-political condition and factors have helped to shape the identity discourse in the space of postcolonial encounter that engenders and delimits the local? By postcolonial I refer here to the space where resistance takes its form in an estranging context, bringing global concepts and values such as democracy, social justice, and human rights to the formerly colonized locals as if those were unknown hybrids left over by history, which few close to the center of pro-Beijing hegemonic rule would seem to readily accept, for fear of tipping the delicate balance of stability and prosperity that must prevail and rule *in situ* in the HKSAR. But what is the sort of work of imagination involved in these limiting acts of resistance? One particular kind of limitation relates to the potential function of the public sphere as a liberating space for ideological negotiations, often creatively evoked in the cinematic world, with which the divergent forces of the community meet and engage, itself deeply caught for decades in a legitimacy crisis entangled with the power, authority, and *mediation* of the colonial public. For it is the mediated public sphere that permits audience and consumers to realize that much of the highly acclaimed “success” story (cherishing openness and liberty, if not democracy and human rights), is what legitimizes the “local achievements” of the Hong Kong society. Thus, when Vivian Lee refers to the “(post)colonial condition” in which “the compressed cultural space where local history disappears into fragments of memories, anecdotes, sentiments, and images,” while reappearing in popular

cultural texts, her attempt is to locate “the city’s historical lightness in films made in a variety of styles and genres.” In her analysis she connects screen memory to “the visual codes and strategies that make it ‘visible’” and puts the “burden of history” through to her readers by showing how “visibility gains weight as it engages with the ‘lightness’ of its subject matter.”

The politics of memory thus articulated informs a kind of cultural turn in the representation of publicness I want to bring up against the background of the apparent lack of critical historical consciousness in the local. Take the film/media public sphere for a closer look. What we ask is how the mega zone could help shape an environment that nurtures creativity for the local communities, where our talents come from. When we can address this with a strategy then we are dealing with practical targets with our rare public resources – space, time, institutions, and professional expertise; and then, we are articulating our ways to cultural citizenship. To be sure, heritage conservation, local creativity, and community participation are crucial elements for any creative ecology. Try to align Stephen Chow’s re-invention of “*mo lei tau*” (literally “nonsense”) style or Jeffrey Lau’s parody of Cantonese Hong Kong culture of the 1960s and 1970s to the making of the local as “a transmutation of hybrid sources,” and it could indeed be argued that “Chow’s comedy exhibits a postmodernist hybridity and playfulness that routinely turns its own nostalgia into a target of appropriation and parody.” Thus, when Lee appropriately identifies the transformation of “the local as a contested site” where “cultural memory, too, has to negotiate with not one but multiple hegemonic discourses,” one is bound to think about, in light of this critical concern, the opportunities and challenges implied by the community-based local practices that have evolved as a result of the recent cultural turn in Hong Kong politics. Hence, for instance, heritage-oriented cultural actions have since 2006 foregrounded the issue of subjectivity as they evolve through a chain of events linking various projects that engage the work of people in the field on many sites of community culture and local heritage. This might well be the “problem of self-image” Lee refers to, one that can be adequately addressed through investigation of the “colonial subject” (as also discussed by Law Wing-sang) she invokes. Indeed, her reference to the “imaginary China” and the difficulty for any “Hong Kong story” to be told despite “the proliferation of local screen memories” (e.g., in the work of Tsui Hark, John Woo, Ann Hui, Allen Fong, Yim Ho, Fruit Chan) may be supplemented by a critique of the narrative of the post-colony. Hence, in such a critique, the *transnational* will no longer be conceived in opposition to the local, nor does it necessarily imply the absence or undermine the relevance of the national. As a function of the social imaginary, contemporary narrative ventures tend also to hinge on, as we can see in the recent cultural identity debates pertaining to Hong Kong *positionalities* in the postcolonial era, the problematics of the national and to rework the postimperial logic of the international, without rendering either of them totally ineffective.

Visibly, the hybrid imagination today captures in an evolving cultural space the historical links between subjectivity and the state (be it colonial or national). At the

core of infrastructure of any people-oriented community imagination is indeed culture. Fairness and free competition on a level playing field are embedded values people lived by, but anyone rooted in community practices but also committed to the cause of grassroots cultural praxis today would find the groundwork shaky in this post-colony for the nurture of culture and creativity as a sustainable solution, and would therefore face deep problems in the daily practices (e.g., street culture, free access to television broadcasting, equal opportunities for daycare as well as university education etc.). Conventionally, the dominant (“success”) story of Hong Kong has been built on the institution of a peculiar colonial process which has effectively, until three decades ago, shielded the territory from the political trauma, disjuncture, and “cultural revolution” the Chinese people had to experience north of its border. As Lee points out, Wong Kar-wai’s “*affective* recollection of iconic images of a bygone era” captures in and for the present-day Hong Kong drifters the “glamour, decadence, and romantic passion that funnel through the camera lenses.” His idiosyncratic cinematic way of “looking back” at time, at identity, and at Hong Kong history is “both constructive and deconstructive.” Thus, one might imagine that as China moved to re-enter the global market, in between the colony (island) and the nation (mainland) the realities of relational identity have undergone significant transformation, aesthetically as well as politically.

Living dangerously on location, we need to *re-configure* a memory construct for the retention and reinvention of the past. For many Hong Kong people, pragmatism has meant that it is not so much sovereignty or nationality or even citizenship that mattered, but real assets in terms of money and security and more money (for want of a strong sense of confidence). Money begets security. Power begets security. And dreams beget dreams. No wonder the longing for an abstract notion of the stability of home has somehow been set as the baseline for entry into world-class urbanity for the local people; and, consequentially, securing a (transitional) place in global capitalism taken as a strategy to protect home from the possible threat of the nation-state. Thus, in the nostalgic film *Echoes of the Rainbow* by Alex Law (2009), “the *desire* of its creator [Law] for a ‘complete preservation’ of childhood dream/memory” is well registered in the dream world and home imaginary readily received by various generations of the local people. As in a host of other “local heritage films,” the audience living in the post-colony must celebrate “a popular version of collective memory through the invocation of the so-called ‘Hong Kong Spirit’” (Lee).

Not surprisingly, the typical Hong Kong imaginary remains a mixture of residual, dominant, and emergent traces registering how it has been recognized and represented. Discourse and action must, however, be taken up as concrete social practices, and realized in the context of the changing rules of the game which govern our rich and fascinating ordinary life – kept so much in good order and at good price for so long through the disparate but joint impacts of the then coercive and effective *governmentality* of the colonizers and the evermore dominant new pro-China regime of power that has, since 1997, succeeded the regressive old-imperialist order, turning it

by phase into a neohegemonic order yet to be named and narrativized by the Hong Kong public. Working tactically on the transition from colonial rule to the new hegemonic governance of Hong Kong, Marco Wan addresses here the intriguing “temporal disruptions at the time of the handover.” He wants to deliberate on how “the law addressed the difficult question of time where Hong Kong was moving back to the future, from the past of being a British colony and towards a future of reunification to the country it was once part of.” In his chapter “Representations of Law in Hong Kong Cinema,” he challenges us to focus our popular imagination on the “question of validity of pre-handover laws in post-handover Hong Kong,” with a view to re-making a version of the identity narrative alluded to above. Reading in the ordinary text of Joe Ma’s 1997 film *Lawyer, Lawyer, Law* asks what was at stake through the alternative take of the legal history that constitutes the Hong Kong story as mediated in popular movies: He is concerned, that is to say, with the question “whether the past, in the form of handover laws, [would] have a presence in the legal system of the future... of post-handover Hong Kong, a question which threatened to destabilize the binary opposition of ‘pre-’ and ‘post,’ past and future in the law” – by way of a detour interrogation via the ordinary filmic text into the nineteenth-century Guangzhou-based Chinese “lawyer” Chan Mong-kut.

Extraordinary as it may seem, to return after such a fictional-historical detour to the fate of identity at this crucial juncture where Hong Kong is presently caught, the challenge would be to navigate through the location and dislocation of postcolonial subjectivity amid junctures in public time and space, handling diverse forms of intensity of cultural–political struggle and negotiation. Narrated in the legal light, the cultural turn and heritage movement mentioned earlier would tend to foreground, dramatize, and contextualize the issue of “subjectivity” through a continuum of events articulated to the various mediations people have to work with on the sites of community life-world and local heritage. A critical perspective one may look for amid all these contradictions is a focus on the work of *confrontation and negotiation* of differences rooted in the often twisted and hybrid sources of identity and sensibility, conveyed for instance in what has been called the jurisprudential (Wan) or the community-based (Lee) dimension of popular cinematic imagination. This is where notions of hybridity, cultural translation, and social imagination become useful conceptual tools. By examining at close range the linkage between local cultural practices and their social contexts and effects, critics have come to adopt an integral perspective for appreciating the *community’s take* on a better public life, and for weaving any corresponding everyday needs and desires into the actual *sources and resources of culture* in our society. Here, localization would not be anything to be afraid of, if only because people in the 1980s and after saw the hybridization of the local through its articulation with a changing national and post-national unconscious. But what the local signified for the Hong Kong people has since changed, following the end of the Great Cultural Revolution on the Chinese mainland and the advance of the “glocal” mass media (e.g., *Cantopop*, local TV, and the New Wave cinema) in the *postcolonial* British colony.

Progressively, with an enhanced “publicness” the growing concerns with local culture and history brought outcomes that benefit the society at large, including: ways for the public to integrate residential with commercial activities (which would protect, maintain, and nourish community network and livelihood); ways to conserve heritage sites through a dialogic, participatory process; and ways to manage cultural sites (points, streets, and zones) that engage individuals in the community. Ainling Wong, in her contribution to this discussion, brings the intricate liaisons between identity and cinema to a distinctly different, though equally revealing critical dimension, by insisting on the historical approach to the realization of what might have constituted the local for Hong Kong cinema as we know it today. The single most significant claim of Wong’s chapter, entitled “The Tales of Fang Peilin and Zhu Shilin: From Rethinking Hong Kong Cinema to Rewriting Chinese Film History,” is that Hong Kong’s rich filmic tradition must be tied and gauged historically with the lineage of Chinese cinema from at least the 1930s and 1940s. Just as we have seen how 1997 turns out to be such a crucial contextual factor for cultural analysis during the late colonial period of British rule, the relevance of cinema for China (and therefore Hong Kong) in between the Sino-Japanese War and World War II should tie us up to local cultural resources of the kind documented and examined in Wong’s fascinating textual-historical study. Leftist proletariat art emerging from both Shanghai and Hong Kong of the 1930s turn out to be crucial factors of the local culture and cultural resources we all want to cherish today, under the threat of postimperialist neoliberalism and globalization. As well as influence from foreign culture (as manifested in the Japanese musical genre), Wong suggests in her tactical intervention how some of the concrete factors worth our critical attention must include conventional genre filmmaking and alternative (non-nationalistic) style of performance found, created, and circulated in relation to the postwar local cinema among the Chinese public (i.e., cinema audience). In the case of Zhu Shilin, all these would have prefigured Hong Kong/Cantonese cinema of the 1950s through to the 1970s, drawing on and allowing posterity to draw on resources and histories of the national-local cinema in the pre-WWII period. Thus, inside and outside of the colony, discourses of the local in the 1950s and 1960s were coextensive with a regional (southern) Chineseness with little remarkable traces of Hong Kong identity as such. In effect, subjectivity has become much more than people’s attachment to “collective memory.”

Increasingly, as we now know, creative industry portfolio and urban infrastructural development since the 1990s have converged to shape policies that integrate local culture, creativity, and socio-economic life for the HKSAR. On the verge of late- and postcolonial capitalism, nurturing local culture, or culture in its multidimensional locations – its talents as well as industry – has become the strategy many cities adopt today to meet the challenge of the global “knowledge economy.” In the contemporary interface where a plurality of cultural acts crosses paths with multiple vectors of locality, even the ordinary individuals have taken

culture as *symbolic resources* embodied in the material form of cultural-creative *products* and *practices*. And as we appreciate the aspirations of people through their use of cultural products and practices – be it the pioneering Chinese craftsmanship of “genre filmmaking” in Fang Peilin or the “escapist cinema” of a Zhu Shilin – we are reassured to learn that a simple (if “progressive”) cultural project could facilitate people to take *and* make culture firmly as the local ways of life, and indeed as a sustained *civic process* embedded in the people-driven, *lived* community experience of *meaning-making*. Established in 2001 under the HKSAR to conduct systematic research and documentation work on Hong Kong cinema, the Hong Kong Film Archive is that site with which we might begin to reconsider the relevance of stressing cultural infrastructure and software building alongside with the desirability of community involvement in the management of cultural venues, facilities, and programs. Keeping the shell of a building for cosmetic or commercial purposes is just no strategy at all, in the eyes of the community leaders in modern cultural and heritage policies. People’s demand is strong for government to put heritage, livelihood, and environmental sustainability together, and return the land of Hong Kong back to their hands. Against the background of the apparent lack of critical consciousness in historical contextualization and cultural diversity in our public culture, community-oriented local cultural developments would surely move Hong Kong closer to becoming a world metropolitan city. Whether it is the “introspective erotic space” in Zhu Shilin’s films (Wong), or the “profound problematization of time” in contemporary legal dramas (Wan), the question of future for Hong Kong must be relevant and significant to the experience of the “popular mass.” Here I am drawing on Wong’s insight as she refers to Fang Peilin’s dedication and appeal to the people of the grassroots, in the “unsettling work of the time, curiously combining the conflicting messages of political agenda with the entertaining format of the [filmic] musical genre.”

At this point, amid a potentially threatening “legal vacuum” (Wan) I want to highlight the work of *negotiation* in cinematic cultural practices of some rather acute cultural-ideological differences rooted in radical sources of identity, location, and sensibility traceable as and in the cultural history of postcolonial Hong Kong. Thus, recognizing that contemporary cultural productions are mediated through three modes of representation informed respectively by the local, the national, and the transnational imaginaries, let me venture to capture in summary the critical stances on Hong Kong subjectivity, as a tactical turn for the continuous making and shaping of its cultural citizenship:

- 1 Hong Kong as a community of needs, aspirations, and solidarity could not have taken the form of cultural dominance conditioned by the hegemony of (post-)colonial modernity we see, experience, and must learn to cope with in the absence of the substantive rule and hegemony of the colonial period.
- 2 Shaped as a cluster of social imaginaries, collective identity with a groundwork in local subjectivity – anchored in the imagination of Hong Kong as home –

has become recognizable during the late colonial period with the passive institutionalization of culture as a space for local communities.

- 3 If to narrate is to dwell on the question of value (White 1975), then to narrate our past underlines the desire to capture collective identity in social dramas whereby the colonized community would grow to maturity and prosperity; in this view, to understand the narrative functions of culture is to see how the stories we live by represent our common yearnings: (i) to return to an identity consciousness through narration, which could never have been gained otherwise; and (ii) to earn a livelihood in the place increasingly realized (because told) as the story of home.
- 4 To historicize, therefore, not least via cinema, is not just a question of temporal reconstruction: it is articulated fully to the search of and making of new identities in public life, while understanding why some of our contemporary positions as speaking subjects seem to have become totally out of joint with those of the past.

The various forms of *identity imaginary* capture the socio-semiotic dimension of public discourse, in which cultural sensibility and imagination are textually embodied and contextually evoked. Studying the early period of documentary filmmaking in the former British colony, Ian Aitken and Mike Ingham demonstrate with meticulous details, in "The Documentary Film in Hong Kong," that on location the Hong Kong people, growing along as a collective with the whole complex of their ideas, beliefs, and sentiments evolving through phases in local history, have had to migrate and move freely in and out of the "imagined communities" (Anderson 1983) that mediated people's imagination of who they were under British colonial rule. Aitken and Ingham put forth a very powerful argument, starting with the claim that, Lai Man-wai, with the first sound documentary film he made in 1934, inscribed film as a strong social record and representation of realities through which cultural identities developed and took root.

Living though colonialism until 1997, the local Chinese Hong Kong subjects had not readily identified themselves as part of an integral community, whether taken as the once colonized, or as the recently decolonized. With the colonizer dominating the scene, the hard cultural question was taken up and addressed by the work of the Hong Kong Film Unit (1958–1969) and the resultant documentaries founded by Radio Television Hong Kong. A public broadcaster modeled after the BBC, RTHK (1970–) produced the first television documentaries *Home in Hong Kong* (1972) and *Below the Lion Rock* (1974). Meanwhile, reinstituted as a free TV service provider in 1973, Rediffusion was initially subscribed to by 2,000 upper-class people of colonial Hong Kong in 1957. When the first local documentary was screened in cinemas in London in 1961, one began to appreciate the specific *locality* in the *negotiation* of cultural and ideological differences rooted in radical sources of identity and subjectivity (Aitken and Ingham).

This commentary attempts to shed light on what “subjectivity” might be for the *post-colony*. The people of Hong Kong have lived in one of the most politically sensitive places in the world with its own unique cultural formation. Having experienced what has come into effect as a unique form of colonial modernity, the former head of the Chinese Xin Hua News Agency in Hong Kong wrote in *Memoire of Xu Jiatun*:

I have a strong feeling that the territorial return (*tudi huigwei*) of Hong Kong (to China) is relatively easy, but the heartfelt (emotional, ideological) return (*renxin huigwei*) of the Hong Kong people is very difficult. When the re-unification of land is not followed by the homecoming of hearts, there is no complete Return (Xu 1993: 93–94).

As far as popular imagination is concerned, though, it may be difficult not to find traces of all the anxiety, bewilderment, and despair tying up the entire chain of productions in cynicism and indifference put out unceasingly by the ever-expanding culture- and media-industry, now running its operation across the already much problematized geopolitical border. The line of distinction involves a politics of identity, to be sure, for which culture – if no more an essentialist local imaginary – is a site of radical contradiction, tension, and negotiation. But as the Hong Kong people realize the inevitable and irreversible course of history, let us try to convince ourselves that what used to play a dominant role in our collective imaginary is changing and will continue to change the ways people reorganize their future, from now on. We can see how this territory, which has in the late and postcolonial times been criticized by the Chinese counterpart of its local imperial authority for being turned by the West into a potential base for “peaceful transformation,” thus runs the risk ironically of being reabsorbed into the hegemony of the “One Country, Two Systems” project. The result, let us admit, might well be the “peaceful transformation” of Hong Kong in the context of China’s effective return to the world market and her eventual assumption of a key, hegemonic role in the drama of the global-capitalist power bloc reconfiguration and realignment.

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Index

- Academy Awards *see* Oscar
- action cinema/film, 4, 5, 28, 30, 37, 39, 53, 91, 92, 116, 123, 127, 136, 156, 180, 266, 285, 294, 297, 298, 310, 320, 322, 325, 350, 384, 452, 459, 506, 534, 552
- Hong Kong action cinema/film, 5, 28, 91, 116, 136, 350, 552
- Adventurous Air Stewardess, The* (1974), 458
- After This Our Exile* (2006), 34, 35, 125, 127, 131, 133, 136, 137, 227
- Aftershock* (2010), 494
- aidez-faire, 93
- Air Hostess* (1959), 445
- Alien 3* (1992), 373
- alienation, 23, 29–31, 33, 43, 276, 502
- All About Love* (2010), 239, 241, 246–8, 253–8, 262
- All's Well, End's Well* (1992), 392, 399
- allusion, 37, 39, 53, 59, 62, 156, 373, 410–414, 424, 425, 427, 429, 433, 434, 493, 507, 516
- Maoist, 425, 427, 434
- Pan-Asian cinema of, 18, 411–14, 434
- visual, 373, 425
- allusionism, 10, 412, 413, 494
- American Dreams in China* (2013), 24, 26, 27, 36, 39, 41, 46, 84, 96, 117
- Amoy-dialect film, 78, 79, 86, 525
- androgyny, 341, 343, 345, 346, 348–50, 352, 353, 356, 361, 365, 368, 371 *see also* cross-dressing; drag
- animation, 6, 8, 140–144, 146, 149–52, 155–7, 159, 161, 165, 166, 248, 319, 546
- Applause Pictures, 35, 411, 413, 415, 431–3, 435, 489, 490, 494
- appropriation, 7, 19, 23, 29, 31–3, 67, 155, 298, 309, 312, 334, 368, 472, 490, 505, 572, 578
- art house cinema, 5, 24, 93, 118, 126, 127, 133, 168, 213, 244, 268, 285, 303, 517
- As Tears Go By* (1988), 441
- As Time Goes By* (1997), 1, 55
- Ashes of Time* (1994), 1, 21, 132, 214, 402, 404, 405, 408, 441, 458, 459, 491
- Asian cinema, 125, 133, 189–92, 195–7, 200, 203, 226–8, 231, 241, 524
- Asian Film Awards (AFA), 187, 196–8, 201, 202, 204
- Asian Film Festival, 169, 170, 173–5, 230
- Asia-Pol* (1967), 173, 336, 337
- Assassin, The* (1967), 329–31, 334
- Assembly* (2007), 494
- auteur, 4, 6, 19, 26, 30, 45, 133, 186, 191, 193, 196, 197, 199–201, 216, 240, 241, 246, 324, 337, 385, 412, 430, 503, 508

- audience reception, 381, 383, 391–3, 489, 493
Auntie Lan (1967), 336
Autumn's Tale, An (1987), 287
- b.o.m. film productions, 415, 432, 433
Back to 1942 (2012), 494
 Baker, Roy Ward, 337
Bangkok Dangerous (1999), 91, 126
Bangkok Dangerous (2008), 91
Be There or Be Square (1998), 217
Beautiful Life, A (2011), 24, 274–8
Because of Her (1963), 530
 Beijing Film Studio, 34
 Beijing Polybona Films Distribution Co. Ltd., 34, 35, 230
 Berlin Film Festival (Berlinale), 63, 187, 189, 191, 194, 195, 197–200, 268, 515
 Bertolucci, Bernardo, 312
Better Tomorrow 3, A (1989), 286, 349, 350
Better Tomorrow, A (1986), 29, 30, 341
Between Husband and Wife (1958), 532
Beyond's Diary (1991), 366
Big Blue Lake (2011), 53, 56, 57, 64, 269
Big Shot's Funeral (2001), 217
 bilingualism, 412, 413, 432, 434
 bisexual, 254, 256, 355, 356
Black Rose II (1997), 506
Black Rose, The (1965), 506
Blade Runner (1982), 373
 Bliss Concepts, 154
 blockbuster (film), 6, 24, 33, 84, 95, 125, 127, 132, 216, 380, 384, 391–3, 396, 404, 514, 531
Boat People (1981), 126, 245
 body, 2, 9, 123–5, 127, 128, 130, 136, 227, 245, 293, 295, 297, 298, 303, 315, 328, 341–4, 349, 350, 352, 353, 356, 367, 510
 cinematic body, 123
 and gender, 2, 9, 124, 245, 295, 297, 303, 328, 341–4, 349, 350, 352, 353, 356, 367, 510
 and genre, 127, 298
 Hong Kong body, 123–5, 127, 136, 227
 language, 84, 345
Rigor Mortis, 100, 103, 104
Bodyguards and Assassins (2009), 35–7, 71, 75, 86, 111
- Bona Film Group, 34–6
 Bong, Joon-ho, 198
 borderland, 5–7, 71–4, 76–81, 83–5, 119
Box (2004), 432
 box office, 93, 97, 98, 143, 147, 149, 167, 196, 228, 265, 311, 393, 533, 544, 551, 554, 563
Break Up Club (2010), 278–80
Breathless (1959), 367, 368, 459
 British Crown Colony, 307, 539
Bruce Lee, My Brother (2010), 53, 68
Burning of the Red Lotus Temple, The (1928), 213
Butterfly Murders (1979), 2
- Calendar Girl* (1956), 529, 530
 Cameron, James, 374
 camp, 6, 289, 341, 345, 346, 349
 Cannes Film Festival, 35, 169, 170, 174, 185, 187, 189, 191, 193, 194, 196–8, 200, 202, 214, 239, 341, 370
 cannibalism, 412, 427–30, 435, 490
 Cantonese, 3, 17, 21, 28, 37, 46, 67, 72, 73, 75–8, 86, 98, 109, 116, 129, 140–142, 144, 145, 150–152, 154, 171, 174, 175, 181, 209–12, 215, 218, 219, 221, 228–30, 265, 272, 273, 292, 354, 355, 361, 365, 368, 370–372, 384, 399, 402, 403, 412–14, 431, 449, 464, 465, 479, 492, 505–7, 509, 516, 517, 525, 530, 533, 534, 536, 537, 543, 546, 547, 549, 563, 578, 581
 Cantonese Opera, 145, 354, 355, 399, 533, 543
 cinema/film, 17, 21, 28, 73, 75–8, 86, 171, 174, 175, 181, 211, 384, 399, 402, 403, 492, 505–7, 525, 530, 533, 534, 536, 549
 language/dialect/dialogues/slang, 75–7, 116, 129, 140–142, 144, 145, 151, 152, 209–11, 216, 218, 219, 228, 229, 265, 272, 273, 292, 361, 365, 368, 370–372, 412–14, 431, 449, 464, 465, 479, 492, 509, 517, 534, 547, 563, 578
 melodrama, 67, 516
 song, 150, 152, 230, 361, 368, 370, 449, 464, 479

- Cantopop, 6, 166, 229, 230, 341, 361–3, 365, 366, 441, 448, 479, 580
- capital accumulation, 93, 292, 296, 298, 299
- Capra, Frank, 2, 398
- Cathay, 75, 78, 80, 81, 175, 177, 199, 371, 491, 525, 529, 532, 533, 546
- Celestial Pictures, 325
- censorship, 18, 26, 33, 76, 81, 84, 93–5, 97, 98, 108, 134, 141, 147–9, 152, 165, 166, 188, 194, 200, 210, 213, 216, 219, 223, 229, 267, 308, 324, 544, 555, 556
- self-censorship, 94, 267, 308, 556
- CEPA (Close Economic Partnership Arrangement), 18, 20, 24, 25, 31, 33, 35, 37, 43, 57, 94, 117, 146–9, 164, 392, 432, 524
- Chan, Dung-chuen, 560
- Chan, Gor, Fruit, 5, 54, 55, 89, 111, 117, 119, 124, 220, 286, 411, 422, 423, 427, 428, 430, 435, 490, 503, 578
- Chan, Hing-kai, 265
- Chan, Ho-sun, Peter, 24, 26, 27, 31, 35, 36, 39, 41, 42, 57, 61, 71, 84, 95, 96, 111, 117, 200, 227, 274, 285, 341, 411–15, 422, 430, 433, 490, 494, 506
- Chan, Jackie, 3, 4, 6, 25, 45, 71, 91, 118, 127, 129, 130, 196, 199, 214, 226, 227, 230, 244, 285, 294, 299, 335–9, 381, 396, 494
- Chan, Ka-sheung, Gordon, 34, 316, 369
- Chan, Lit-ban, 326
- Chan, Muk-sing, Benny, 27, 34, 350
- Chan, Tak-sum, Teddy, 36, 71, 111
- Chan, Ya, 467, 475, 481
- Chan, Yiu-shing, Evans, 3, 8, 230, 468, 516, 517, 540, 549, 552
- Chang, Ai-Chia, Sylvia, 298
- Chang, Ailing, Eileen, 269, 525
- Chang, Cheh, 176, 177, 179, 180, 183, 200, 324–32, 334, 336, 338, 339, 525,
- Chang, Chen, 98
- Chang, Suk-ping, William, 269, 350
- Changing Hearts* (1943), 531
- Chaozhou-dialect film, 78, 79, 86, 402, 525
- Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle* (2003), 118
- Cheang, Pou-Soi, 373
- Chen, Huanwen, 371
- Chen, Kaige, 125, 194, 341, 346, 348, 412
- Chen, Koon-hei, Edison, 379, 380
- Chen, Kuan-tai, 62, 333, 338
- Chen, Zhen, 313, 316–18
- Cheng, Chung-kei, Ronald, 133, 134, 218
- Cheng, Kang, 330, 331
- Cheng, Pei-pei, 331
- Cheng, Sau-man, Sammi, 354, 355
- Cheng, Sze-kit, Clement, 53, 59, 61, 108, 266, 269, 286, 514
- Cheng, Yee-kin, Ekin, 379
- Cheung, Hok-yau, Jacky, 214, 363, 408
- Cheung, Hung, Tammy, 86, 237, 239, 539, 540, 552–6
- Cheung, King-wai, King, 553
- Cheung, Kin-ting, Alfred, 560
- Cheung, Kwok-wing, Leslie, 10, 229, 341–9, 356, 357, 363, 379, 381, 399, 402, 403, 408
- Cheung, Man-yuk, Maggie, 31, 46, 118, 123, 193, 199, 259, 379, 382, 399, 400, 402, 509, 510
- Cheung, Pak-chi, Cecilia, 134, 354, 355, 379
- Cheung, Yuen-ting, Mabel, 63, 237, 286, 287, 515
- Chiang, Da-wei, David, 324, 328, 337, 338, 380, 386,
- Chiba, Yasuki, 173
- Chin, Kwok-wai, Wilson, 381
- Chin, Ping, 177, 326–8
- Chin, Siu-ho, 101
- China Behind* (1974), 220
- China Film Co., 24, 34
- China Film Co-Production Corporation, 147, 148
- China Film Group, 34, 147
- Chinese Boxer, The* (1970), 323, 324, 332–4, 336, 339
- Chinese Competitors at the Sixth Far East Sports Games in Japan* (1922), 541
- Chinese film history, 523, 526, 533, 534, 581
- Chinese Ghost Story, A* (1987), 339, 341
- Chinese independent cinema, 194–6
- Chinese New Year film, 10, 391–7, 399, 401, 402, 405–8, 515
- Chinese Odyssey 2002* (2002), 364, 369, 392, 400, 403, 405

- Chinese Odyssey Part One: Pandora's Box*, A (1995), 369, 401, 404
- Chinese Odyssey Part Two: Cinderella*, A (1995), 369, 401, 404
- Chineseness, 19, 160, 181, 215, 230, 231, 311, 375, 395, 405, 431, 435, 495, 517, 519, 581
- Ching, Siu-tung, 34, 341, 342, 366
- Chiu, Leung-chun, Samson, 507, 514, 520
- Choi, Cheuk-yin, Charlene, 373, 379
- Cholodenko, Lisa, 257
- Chong, Man-keung, Felix, 26, 34, 84, 126, 149, 298, 380
- Chor, Yuen, 506, 514, 526
- Chow, Kar-ling, Valerie, 458
- Chow, Man-wai, Raymond, 180, 197
- Chow, Sing-chi, Stephen, 6, 26, 34, 92, 96, 117, 118, 192, 381, 392, 399, 400, 494, 505, 508, 560, 563, 578
- Chow, Wai-man, Vivian, 254
- Chow, Yun-fat, 29, 30, 32, 117, 118, 196, 226, 350, 379, 381, 384
- chronotope, 393, 394, 403, 405, 407, 489, 490
- Chu, Shun, 467, 475–7, 482
- Chu, Yen-Ping, 338
- Chun, Kim, 506
- Chun, Siu-chun, Janet, 265
- Chung, Chang-hwa, 183
- Chung, Shu-kai, 53, 392
- Chung, Yan-tung, Gillian, 379
- Chungking Express*, 10, 26, 55, 359, 364, 366–70, 440, 441, 443–5, 447–9, 452, 456–9, 490, 492, 495
- Chungking Mansions, 135, 440–442, 444, 452, 454, 456, 496
- cinema going, 95, 96, 391, 393, 394, 401, 406, 407
- Citizen Kane* (1941), 251
- Civil Wind* (1935), 532
- CJ7* (2008), 26, 34, 96
- claustrophilia, 405, 406, 408, 493
- Claustrophobia* (2008), 270–272
- Clouse, Robert, 84, 322, 323
- CNEX, 553, 555, 556
- Cohen, Rob, 309
- Cold War* (2012), 90, 97, 106–8, 148
- colonialism, 2, 55, 85, 86, 92, 106, 109, 124, 226, 243, 244, 315, 360, 381, 486, 503, 504, 508, 512, 583 *see also* postcolonialism
- colonial ideology, 504
- colonial-capitalist ideology, 503
- colonial modernity, 81, 583, 584
- coloniality, 94, 110, 310, 471, 479, 487
see also postcoloniality
- Come Drink With Me* (1966), 177, 180, 331
- comedy, 6, 19, 20, 26, 28, 44, 53, 61, 65, 75, 92, 96, 97, 101, 118, 123, 126, 127, 133, 135, 136, 173, 196, 201, 207, 221, 247, 257, 266, 294, 338, 353–5, 369, 386, 392, 393, 396–8, 400, 445, 494, 505, 507, 513, 526, 531–4, 560, 563, 578
- action/kung fu, 92, 126, 294
- family, 44, 397, 398
- festive/festival, 53, 396, 400
- horror-comedy, 97, 101
- romantic, 20, 28, 65, 173, 196, 221, 247, 257, 266, 354, 369, 507
- transvestite, 354
- community activism, 54, 62, 64
- Comrades, Almost a Love Story* (1996), 31, 32, 35, 117, 274–6, 285, 291, 422
- Confession of Pain* (2006), 34, 298
- Confucius* (2010), 32, 117
- cool, 360–363, 367–70, 374
- co-production, 6–8, 17–23, 25–9, 31–5, 37, 38, 42–5, 57, 67, 68, 81, 82, 84, 94–6, 98, 111, 116, 118, 119, 126, 140, 146–54, 164–6, 169, 172–4, 176, 187, 195, 196, 198–202, 217, 219, 228–30, 259, 303, 304, 323, 332, 337, 410–412, 432, 435, 514
- China–other, 29, 45
- Hong Kong–Japan, 169, 172, 173, 176
- Hong Kong–other, 81, 126, 174, 323, 332, 337, 435
- Hong Kong–China, 7, 8, 17–19, 21–3, 25–8, 32, 34, 35, 38, 42–4, 57, 67, 68, 84, 94–8, 111, 119, 140, 146–54, 164–6, 217, 219, 228–30, 303, 304, 412, 432, 514
- cosmopolitanism, 9, 242–5, 259–61, 268, 359, 360, 364, 369, 373, 375, 376, 491, 492

- costumed drama, 38, 118, 324, 325
Courthouse on Horseback (2006), 195
Crazy Racer (2009), 202
 crisis cinema, 5, 7, 51, 52, 54, 117, 266, 503
 cross-dressing, 10, 342–9, 351–6, 369, 384
 see also androgyny; drag
Crossing Hennessy (2010), 53, 56, 57, 64, 65, 266, 274, 276–8
Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon (2000), 24, 312
 cultural capital, 186, 202, 292, 296, 298, 446
Cut (2004), 433
- Dadi Century, 68
 Dadi Entertainment, 68
 Dadi Film Company, 543
 Dadi Media, 95, 113
 Daiei Studios, 82, 170
Dark Knight, The (2008), 6
Datong: the Great Society (2011), 516, 517, 519, 553
Days of Being Wild (1990), 132, 341, 403, 509–11
Deadly Silver Spear (1977), 338
Departed, The (2006), 91, 118
 developmentalism, 57, 62, 101
 dialect cinema/film, 78–80, 86, 211, 534
 see also Amoy dialect film; Cantonese cinema/film; Chaozhou-dialect film; Mandarin cinema/film
 diary film, 11, 463, 465, 466, 483, 484, 489, 496
 diaspora, 3, 5, 9, 26, 38, 60, 78, 108, 136, 212, 220, 227, 231, 239, 243, 244, 284–7, 290, 291, 294, 299, 303, 309, 360, 362, 395, 479, 483, 518
 Chinese diaspora (*also* mainland diaspora), 5, 9, 38, 60, 108, 136, 212, 227, 239, 244, 286, 287, 290, 291, 299, 309, 360, 362, 395, 479, 483
 discursive space, 52, 56, 62, 67
Dividing Wall, The (1952), 532, 535
 documentary, 6, 11, 58, 64, 65, 85, 86, 98, 199, 202, 237, 239, 250, 272, 463, 468, 481, 485, 487, 496, 539–57, 561, 583
 docudrama, 501, 517, 519
 independent, 496, 552, 555, 556
 personal, 463
 television/TV, 485, 539, 540, 548
- Doe, Ching, 173, 529, 534
Don't Go Breaking My Heart (2011), 27, 196, 227, 228, 380,
 Dong, Jie, 371
 Doyle, Christopher, 126, 200, 422, 452
 Dozier, William, 314
 drag, 343–5
 performance, 344, 345
 queen, 343
Dragon: The Bruce Lee Story (1993), 309
Dream Factory, The (1997), 217
Drug War (2012), 26, 27, 42, 45, 84
Duel of Fists (1971), 200
Dumplings, 410–414, 419, 422, 423, 425–36, 490
Durian Durian (2000), 119, 124, 220
- Eagle-Shooting Heroes, The* (1993), 392, 400
Echoes of the Rainbow (2009), 53, 56, 57, 59, 63, 64, 68, 267, 268, 514, 515, 579
 Edison Company, 540, 541
Edison Shorts, The (1898), 540, 556
 Edko Films, 24, 28, 35, 351
Election (2005), 132, 220, 298
Election 2 (2006), 220
 emigrants, 76, 86, 95, 286 *see also*
 immigrants; migrants
 Emperor Entertainment, 24, 25, 35, 44
Empress Wu Tse-tien (1963), 174, 175
Enter the Dragon (1973), 84, 322, 323, 337
Eternity (1993), 365
 ethnicity, 5, 7, 76, 85, 208, 211, 238, 245, 309, 310, 365, 519
 Eurocentric, 74, 77, 190, 191, 197
 evidence, 562–4, 566, 569–71
Executioners (1993), 342
 exile, 3, 6, 38, 39, 126, 127, 131, 132, 136, 216, 243, 285, 330, 370, 395, 517–19
Exiled (2006), 298
 exoticism, 4, 7, 127, 133
 experimental cinema, 463, 484
 export substitution, 95
Eye, The (2002), 431, 433
- Fallen Angels* (1995), 441
 Fang, Peilin, 491, 523, 526, 529, 530, 534, 535, 581, 582

- Fantasy Mission Force* (1979), 338
Farewell China (1990), 285, 286, 288, 293
Farewell My Concubine (1993), 196, 341, 346–8
 Fellini, Federico, 190, 457
 female masculinity, 342, 349
 femininity, 123, 257, 341, 343, 345, 351, 353, 355, 356, 359, 360, 362
 feminism, 6, 9, 237, 238, 241, 242, 246, 247, 254, 257, 259–61, 303, 552
 Feng, Huang, 524, 530, 532, 533, 544, 809
 Feng, Xiaogang, 24, 217, 494
 festivity, 250, 391, 394, 396, 404–6, 408, 493, 494
 Fifth Generation, 30, 36, 37, 194, 204, 215, 216, 308
Fighter's Blues, A (2000), 284, 298
Files of Justice, The (Part II) (1992), 365
 Film Development Fund (FDF) (by Hong Kong SAR Government), 63, 93, 149
 film festival, 8, 36, 81, 169, 185, 186, 188–91, 195, 196, 198, 199, 201, 203, 227, 244, 259, 260, 551 *see also* Berlin Film Festival; Cannes Film Festival; Hong Kong International Film Festival; Venice Film Festival
 film programming, 8, 186, 187, 191, 192, 194, 197, 200, 201, 226, 524
 global film festival circuit/network, 189, 195, 203
 Film Workshop Productions, 190
 Fincher, David, 39, 373
Finding Mr. Right (2013), 24, 28, 96
Fist of Fury (1972), 183, 313, 315, 316, 322–4, 333
Fist of Legend (1994), 316
Five Fingers of Death (1972), 3, 183
 Fleming, Victor, 2
Flirting Scholar (1950), 86
 Fong, Ling-ching, Eddie, 351
 Ford, John, 2
 Fortissimo Films, 190, 200, 202
Four Real Friends (1976), 338
Fried Glutinous Rice (2010), 53, 57
Full Moon in New York (1990), 286
Fulltime Killer (2003), 1
 Fung, Bo-bo, 176, 256, 326, 327, 506
 Fung, Fung, 54, 73
Fuss Fuss 1997 (1998), 467, 481–4
Gallants (2010), 35, 53, 57, 59, 61, 62, 64, 68, 108, 266, 514
 Gam, Sing-yan, 355
 gangster, 21, 29, 31, 117, 129, 134, 207, 218, 285, 286, 292, 294, 299, 350, 366, 369, 459, 509, 534
 Garcia, Roger, 133, 203, 231
Garden of Repose (1964), 533
 gay, 255, 257, 285, 287–90, 299, 341, 342, 346, 370, 564, 565
 gender, 2, 3, 5, 7, 9, 123, 176, 188, 237–41, 243, 245, 254, 256, 258–61, 284–6, 299, 342–5, 347, 348, 354, 355, 359, 361, 367, 381, 400, 531, 532, 552 *see also* queer; sexuality
 and diaspora, 284, 285, 290, 299, 303
 and sexual identity, 257, 342, 343, 350, 355, 356, 365
 neutral/neutrality, 176, 361
 performativity, 342
 queer identity and neoliberalism, 285, 288–90
 war, 531, 532
 genre, 3–6, 10, 17, 18, 20, 21, 25, 26, 28, 30, 33, 36, 39, 43, 58, 59, 61, 62, 68, 75, 84, 85, 90–92, 94, 96, 97, 101, 102, 118, 123, 126, 127, 136 n.1, 159, 168, 169, 180, 183, 190, 199, 213, 214, 240, 266, 269, 285, 294, 297–9, 310, 324, 330, 333, 349, 353, 366, 382, 384, 385, 391–4, 401, 403, 404, 406, 408, 412–14, 423, 433, 434, 440, 489–94, 496, 502, 506–9, 526, 527, 529, 530, 534, 542, 578, 581, 582 *see also* action cinema/film; Chinese New Year film; comedy; documentary; experimental cinema; horror film; kung fu cinema; martial arts film; nostalgic cinema
 cinema/film/filmmaking, 17, 18, 21, 26, 33, 36, 39, 91, 118, 183, 266, 349, 414, 423, 506, 526, 581, 582
 subgenre, 214, 384, 445, 560
 temporal genre, 393, 394, 408

- geography/geographic, 3, 5, 7–9, 55, 150,
151, 161, 165, 185, 188, 190–192, 198,
200, 203, 225, 226, 228, 231, 232, 272,
273, 369, 376, 444, 489, 490, 494
cinematic, 185, 192, 226, 228
critical, 7–9, 225, 226, 231, 232
cultural, 127, 231
imagined, 187
ghost film, 10, 94, 422, 495
Ghost in the Shell (1995), 6, 373, 374
Girl in Disguise (1936), 526, 527
globalization, 2, 4, 7, 8, 17, 19, 20, 23, 33,
41–3, 89–92, 117, 119, 127, 169, 174,
203, 228, 229, 231, 242, 244, 260, 261,
293, 361, 502, 524, 581
cultural, 4, 17, 19, 20, 33, 42, 43
managed, 7, 19, 20
glocal/glocalize/glocalization, 92, 93, 102,
363, 580
Godard, Jean-Luc, 367, 440, 457, 459, 552
Goddess, The (1934), 383
Going Home, 410–417, 419, 420, 422, 427,
431–4, 436, 490, 495
Golden Hairpin, The (1963), 326
Golden Harvest Company, 91, 183, 323, 525
Golden Horse Awards (Taiwan), 227, 342, 517
Golden Swallow (1968), 325, 328, 330, 331, 334
Gone With the Wind (1939), 2
Gong, Li, 196, 347, 348, 370, 371, 510
Gosha, Hideo, 177, 178, 180, 327
Grand Substitution, The (1965), 175
Grandmaster, The (2013), 26, 27, 35, 84, 89,
97, 98, 108, 109, 313, 319, 320, 380
Great China Film Company, 526, 530
Great Wall Movie Enterprise, 80, 524, 530,
543, 544
Greatest Civil War on Earth, The (1961), 75, 76
Greatest Love Affair on Earth, The (1964), 86
Greatest Wedding on Earth, The (1962), 86
Green Hornet, The (1966–7), 314
HAF (Hong Kong-Asia Film Financing
Forum), 187, 194, 197, 198,
200–204, 226
Han, 71, 73, 75, 86, 207–16, 218–21, 230, 519
hegemony, 209
imaginary, 208
normativity, 208–11, 213–15
Han-centric vision, 208, 210, 218
Hands Over Belly Button (1998), 467, 482
Happy Together (1997), 285, 289, 341, 348, 370
He Ain't Heavy, He's My Father (1993), 35,
61, 506, 507
He's a Woman, She's a Man (1994), 35, 341
hegemony, 20, 52, 53, 57, 67, 79, 82, 111,
186, 209, 220, 310, 352, 360, 368,
582, 584
hegemonic discourse, 299, 352, 375,
508, 578
hegemonic ideology, 74
Real-estate, 52, 57, 111
heritage, 11, 55, 57, 60, 68, 153, 267–9, 278,
280, 400, 483, 509, 512–15, 523, 524,
578–82
cultural, 11, 55, 57, 60, 400, 483
heritage activism, 268, 269, 280
heritage film, 513, 579
imagined, 509, 512, 513
Hero (2002), 312
Heroic Trio, The (1993), 342
heteronormative, 259, 285–9, 293, 294, 299,
364–72, 375, 376
heteronormative/heterosexual
romance, 267, 270, 272, 360, 364–7,
369, 370
non-heteronormative, 287, 288
heterosexual, 247, 248, 257, 267, 270–272,
287, 291, 354–6, 360, 364–7, 369, 370
Hidden Heroes (2004), 373
Himalaya Singh (2004), 125, 127, 133–6, 227
history of everyday life (HOEL), 464, 470,
471, 486, 487
Hitchcock, Alfred, 341, 459
Ho Sai-hong, Ivy, 53, 65, 237, 266, 270,
274, 277
Ho, Li-li, Lily, 326, 327
Ho, Yuhang, 196
hollywood, 2, 5, 6, 8, 21, 24, 25, 28, 29, 35,
44, 45, 80, 83, 84, 90–93, 118, 124, 125,
140, 168, 169, 172, 173, 175, 177, 183,
186–91, 196, 204, 225–7, 230, 244, 257,
266, 291, 295, 309, 327, 333, 349, 368,

- 374, 381–3, 385, 391, 400, 411, 412,
430, 456, 459, 469, 527–9, 531, 532,
542, 546, 577
- homonormative, 290, 299, 375
- homosexuality, 148, 255, 287–90, 345, 346,
348, 349, 354–6, 552
- Hong Kong Arts Centre (HKAC), 463–5,
479, 485, 486, 518
- Hong Kong Arts Development Council
(HKADC), 220, 463, 552, 556
- Hong Kong Case, The* (1989), 539, 548, 556
- Hong Kong Film and Television Market
(FILMART), 185, 191, 197, 200
- Hong Kong Film Archive (HKFA), 190, 507,
523–5, 533, 535, 540, 542, 550, 556, 582
- Hong Kong Film Archive, 190, 507, 523,
524, 535, 540, 542, 550, 556, 582
- Hong Kong Film Awards (HKFA), 35, 106,
108, 111, 202, 227, 239
- Hong Kong film industry, 17, 23, 33, 57, 74,
75, 80–82, 84, 89, 90, 92, 94, 98, 117, 124,
125, 147, 311, 312, 411, 440, 514, 549, 556
- Hong Kong Film Unit, 539, 540, 544–6,
548, 583
- Hong Kong handover (*also* 1997 handover),
3, 4, 7, 52–6, 58, 59, 67, 73, 116, 117,
124, 141, 145, 147, 149, 238, 286, 307,
312, 318, 374, 392, 397, 398, 400, 412,
420, 422, 427, 431, 462, 464, 470, 471,
475, 477–9, 482, 486, 513, 514, 539, 540,
548, 553, 555, 560, 561, 565–8, 570, 580
- pre-handover, 422, 566, 567, 580
- post-handover, 7, 52–4, 58, 59, 67, 124,
412, 422, 513, 514, 540, 566–8, 580
- post-1997, 4, 8, 37, 43, 71, 85, 104, 107,
119, 123, 124, 126, 127, 207, 309, 317,
359, 360, 375, 485, 493, 496, 534
- Hong Kong identity, 8, 124, 155, 228, 242,
295, 312, 494, 581
- Hong Kong International Film Festival
(HKIFF), 4, 8, 185–203, 226, 228, 464,
467, 468, 485, 490, 517, 524, 551, 554, 555
- Hong Kong New Wave, 2, 4, 36, 89, 90, 97,
99, 108, 241, 491, 495
- Hong Kong SAR New Wave, 53, 90, 95–7,
99, 101, 106, 108, 110
- Hong Kong Television Broadcasts Limited
(TVB), 342, 364, 381, 408, 547, 549
- Hong Kong Tokyo Honeymoon* (1957), 172
- Hong Kong Urban Council, 189, 191, 551
- Hongkongization, 95
- horror film (*also* horror genre), 4, 84, 91,
133, 272, 393, 414, 422, 433, 434, 489,
490, 493, 494
- House of Flying Daggers* (2004), 24, 312
- Hu, Jinquan, King, 30, 177, 192–4, 204, 216, 327
- Hu, Mei, 32, 117
- Huang, Jianxin, 35, 36, 128
- Huayi Brothers, 24
- Huaying, 530, 532
- Hui, Koon-kit, Sam, 166
- Hui, On-wah, Ann, 2, 9, 27, 32, 34, 35, 46,
53–5, 64, 111, 117, 126, 138, 197, 202,
214, 217, 237, 239–41, 245, 246, 249,
252–4, 256, 258, 259, 261, 285, 303,
468, 496, 503, 520, 550, 578
- Human Imperfections* (1974), 200
- Hung, Kam-bo, Sammo, 35, 119, 338
- I Love Hong Kong* (2011), 57, 392
- I'm a Cyborg, but That's Okay* (2007), 198
- ideology, 7, 8, 21, 51, 52, 73, 74, 77, 81, 83,
86, 93, 129, 164, 165, 211, 244, 245,
285, 289, 290, 298, 299, 309, 317, 359,
362, 364, 376, 503, 504, 528, 529, 532,
545, 549
- paternal, 362
- political, 81
- socialist, 532
- state, 8, 164, 165
- If You Are the One* (2008), 217
- imaginary, 8, 23, 29, 37, 39, 40, 43, 44, 54,
59, 67, 73, 90, 99–102, 126, 127, 133,
141, 146, 150, 155, 162, 164, 165, 168,
208, 220, 229, 346, 353, 406, 434, 492,
502, 510, 578, 579, 583, 584
- Chinese imaginary/imaginary China,
168, 346, 502, 578
- cinematic, 11, 54, 126, 503, 580
- imagined community, 44, 407, 583
- imagined modernity, 507–9, 511, 512
- regional, 8–10, 127, 133, 324

- immigrants, 6, 78, 79, 128, 129, 145, 212, 252, 256, 261, 272, 287, 294, 364, 449, 479, 534, 553 *see also* emigrants; migrants
- Chinese migrants/immigrants, 79, 128, 212, 256, 261, 285, 290–294, 296, 298, 364, 422
- Hong Kong, 449
- illegal Chinese, 128
- immigration, 105, 253, 257, 258, 395
- impersonation, 349, 354, 355
- In the Mood for Love* (2000), 26, 123, 126, 200, 269, 370, 452, 509–11, 513
- Infernal Affairs* (2002), 12, 26, 91, 298, 380, 386
- Initial D* (2005), 298
- Inter-pol* (1967), 173
- intersexuality, 342, 345
- Invincible Sword, The* (1972), 324, 335
- Invisible Waves* (2006), 200, 202
- Ip Man, 10, 26, 98, 109, 110, 313–20
- Ip Man* (2008), 25, 26, 44, 117, 313, 314, 316
- Ip Man 2* (2010), 25, 26, 44, 53, 57, 67, 68, 313
- Ip Man: The Final Fight* (2013), 314, 319
- Ip, Tak-han, Deanie, 239
- Ishibashi, Yoshimasa, 198
- Island of Fire* (1990), 338, 340
- It's a Mad, Mad, Mad World* (1987), 392, 395–8, 401
- It's a Mad, Mad, Mad World II* (1988), 396, 397
- It's a Mad, Mad, Mad World III* (1989), 396, 397
- It's Always Spring* (1962), 530
- Iwai, Shunji, 197, 202, 204
- Japanese Cinema, 180, 196, 453
- Japanese occupied Shanghai, 526, 534, 535
- Jai, Zhangke, 30, 31, 194, 195, 204
- Jin, Yong (Cha, Leung-yung, Louis), 213–15, 217, 230, 402, 505
- Joint Declaration (Sino-British Joint Declaration of 1984), 53, 90, 194, 374, 560, 565
- Joseph McGinty Nichol, 118
- Journey to the West: Conquering the Demons* (2013), 97, 117, 392
- July Rhapsody* (2002), 246, 436
- June Bride* (1960), 491
- Justice My Foot!* (1992), 560
- Kadokawa Pictures, 433
- Kaneshiro, Takeshi, 366, 382, 441, 449, 452, 453
- karaoke, 41, 274, 275, 280
- Karate Kid, The* (2010), 128, 295, 312
- Kawashima Yoshiko* (1990), 349, 351
- Kid, The* (1950), 54, 73, 506
- Kids Are All Right, The* (2010), 257
- Kill Bill 1* (2003), 118, 134
- Kill Bill 2* (2004), 118
- Kim, Jee-woon, 432
- Kimura, Takuya, 371–3
- Kingdom and the Beauty, The* (2009), 174, 404
- KJ: Music and Life* (2009), 554
- Ko, Chi-sum, Clifton, 392, 398, 400
- Kong Ngee Co., 81, 507, 520, 525
- Kong, Pak-leung, Patrick (Yip Lim-sum), 392
- Koo, Tin-lok, Louis, 42, 385
- Ku, Feng, 325, 326
- kung fu, 3, 59, 61, 62, 84, 90–92, 98, 108–10, 128, 152, 153, 216, 294, 295, 315, 320, 322, 323, 334, 335, 337, 505, 514, 534
- cinema/film/genre, 59, 62, 91, 92, 322, 323, 337, 381, 505, 534
- Kung Fu Hustle* (2004), 96, 505, 514
- Kurosawa, Akira, 37, 169, 170, 176, 177, 180, 197, 334, 340
- Kurosawa, Kiyoshi, 197
- Kwan, Kam-pang, Stanley, 4, 21, 54, 55, 60, 196, 257, 286, 341, 342, 348, 422, 468, 493, 495, 552
- Kwok, Chi-kin, Derek, 53, 61, 108, 117, 266, 392, 514
- Kwok, Fu-shing, Aaron, 106, 131, 214, 363, 384
- La Chine Moderne* (1914), 541
- La Comedie Humaine* (2010), 265, 266, 272
- La dolce vita* (1960), 457
- Lady General, The* (1964), 175
- Ladybird Ladybird* (1994), 247
- Lai, Man-wai, 11, 525, 526, 541, 542, 583
- Lai, Ming, Leon, 46, 126, 214, 338, 363, 370, 417, 422
- Lai, Miu-suet, Carol, 237
- Lai, Yan-chi, 53

- laissez faire, 81, 92–4, 102, 215, 503, 504
 Lam, Tsong, 543
 Lan Kwai Fong, 381, 441–3, 446, 448, 458, 496
Lan Kwai Fong (2011), 381
Lan Kwai Fong 2 (2012), 381
Lan Kwai Fong 3 (2014), 381
Last Emperor, The (1987), 45, 312
Last Life in the Universe (2003), 200
Last Woman of Shang (1964), 174
 Lau, Ching-wan, Sean, 106, 134, 385
 Lau, Chun-wai, Jeffrey, 364, 369, 392, 401, 405, 506, 578
 Lau, Kar-leung, 329
 Lau, Kar-ling, Carina, 385, 405
 Lau, Tak-wah, Andy, 28, 106, 118, 119, 153, 196, 214, 284, 298, 338, 353, 363, 382–4, 386, 560
 Lau, Wai-keung, Andrew, 24, 34, 36, 91, 274, 286, 298, 313
 law and film, 561, 575
Law on the Brink (1994), 560
 Law, Cheuk-yiu, Clara, 4, 126, 237, 285, 286
 Law, Kai-yui, Alex, 53, 63, 267, 514, 515, 579
 Law, Kar, 67, 180, 524, 526, 541, 549, 550
Lawyer, Lawyer (1997), 560–564, 566, 569, 573, 575, 580
 Lazenby, George, 337, 338
Leaving Me, Loving You (2004), 369, 370
 Lee, Ang, 24, 211, 213, 244, 312
 Lee, Chang-dong, 198, 204
 Lee, Chi-ngai, 35, 111, 507
 Lee, Man-kwong, 542
 Lee, Pik-wah, Lillian, 347, 348, 351
 Lee, Siu-lung, Bruce, 3, 4, 6, 9, 10, 26, 53, 54, 68, 84, 123, 168–70, 183, 190, 193, 285, 295, 309–20, 322–5, 333, 337, 339, 379, 382, 385, 386, 491, 505, 506
 Lee, Wai-man, Raymond, 366
 Lee, Yan-gong, Daniel, 34, 284
 leftist, 80, 86, 507, 514, 524, 526, 527, 532, 533, 581
 production, 532
Legend of the 7 Golden Vampires, The (1974), 333, 337
Legend of the Fist: The Return of Chen Zhen (2010), 313, 316
Legendary Ranger (1993), 365
Les belles (1961), 529
 lesbian, 247, 254–7, 364
 lesbianism, 239, 342
 Leung, Chiu-Wai, Tony, 26, 98, 118, 126, 214, 350, 366, 370, 379–81, 385, 386, 404, 441, 444, 448, 449, 509
 Leung, Ka-fai, Tony, 38, 46, 106, 338, 385, 402, 403, 424, 506
 Leung, Long-man, Longman, 90, 97, 106, 108, 148
 Leung, Ping-kwan (a.k.a. Ye Si), 54, 67, 467, 475, 477
 Leung, Siu-lung, 62
 Li, Cheuk-to, 29, 186, 191, 195, 196, 200, 204, 524, 536
 Li, Han-Hsiang (Li Hanxiang), 174, 175, 193, 216, 311, 328, 404, 525
 Li, Lianjie, Jet, 118, 196, 199, 285, 316, 323, 381–3, 494
 Li, Lihua, 170, 171
 Li, Yu, 31
 Lianhua Film Company, 211, 526, 530, 532
Life and Times of Wu Zhong Xian, The (2003), 549, 553
Life Without Principle (2011), 107, 380
 Lin, Ching-Hsia, Brigitte, 366, 368, 379, 402, 441, 456, 458
 Ling, Po, Ivy, 79, 326, 327
 Little, Dwight H., 309
 Liu, Jie, 195
 Lo, Kwai-cheung, 5–7, 71, 136, 431, 467, 475, 482, 496
 Lo, Kwan-ho, 544
 Lo, Lieh, 177, 325–8, 331, 333
 Lo, Ming-yau, 526, 532
 Lo, Wei, 170, 171, 183, 200, 313, 322, 337, 340
 Loach, Ken, 247
 local consciousness, 8, 140, 141, 165
Long Arm of the Law (1984), 560
 Long Shong Pictures, 350, 366
Long Vacation (1996), 373
Longest Summer, The (1998), 423
Lost in Beijing (2007), 31
Lost in Thailand (2012), 28, 96
Love Actually... Sucks! (2011), 381

- Love Eterne, The* (1963), 175, 326, 328, 404
Love Generation (1997), 373
Love in a Puff (2010), 266, 270, 272, 273, 276
Love in the Buff (2012), 26, 273
Love on a Diet (2001), 384
Love Parade (1963), 529
Love with an Alien (1958), 174
Lovely Husbands (1969), 458
 Luk, Kim-ching, Sunny, 90, 106, 108, 148
 Lung, Kong, 190, 193, 525
Lust, Caution (2007), 211
- Ma, Wai-ho, Joe, 374, 380, 560, 580
Mad Detective, The (2007), 227, 380
Madame White Snake (1956), 82
Made in Hong Kong (1997), 5, 55, 423
Magic Crane, The (1993), 350
Magnificent Trio, The, 177, 179–83, 327–9, 332
 mainlandization, 7, 21, 53, 62, 84, 89, 90,
 94–8, 101, 104–8, 111, 117, 119, 304
 Mak, Chun-lung, Juno, 90, 97, 100, 104,
 105, 111
 Mak, Dong-git, Michael, 560
 Mak, Dong-hong, Johnny, 560
 Mak, Hei-yan, Heiward, 237, 266
 Mak, Hoi-shan, Anson, 463, 466, 552, 554
 Mak, Ka-pik, Alice, 140, 141, 165
 Mak, Siu-fai, Alan, 26, 34, 84, 91, 126, 149,
 298, 380
 Mak, Yan-yan, 53, 59, 237, 269, 286, 554
Mama Sings a Song (1957), 532
Mambo Girl (1957), 491
Man Called Tiger, A (1976), 337
Man from Hong Kong, The (1975), 323, 337, 338
 Manchu/Manchuria, 71, 75, 208, 210, 212,
 215, 221, 239, 333, 351
 Manchukuo, 351
Mandarin Bowl (1956), 83
 Mandarin cinema/film, 24, 25, 35, 44, 67,
 75, 76, 79, 86, 175, 530, 533
 Mao, Ying, Angela, 337,
- martial arts, 3, 4, 8, 10, 20, 26, 28, 30, 36,
 39, 57, 61, 84, 90–92, 98, 107, 109,
 118, 123, 128, 134, 150, 153, 168, 169,
 173, 176, 213–15, 244, 310, 311,
 314–17, 322–5, 329–35, 350, 360, 380,
 384, 402, 403, 406, 454, 491, 493, 494,
 501, 505, 506, 514
 film (*wuxia pian*), 3, 4, 8, 10, 20, 26, 30,
 36, 57, 84, 91, 92, 118, 123, 128, 168,
 169, 173, 213, 244, 310, 316, 317, 322,
 323, 329, 330, 333, 340, 402, 403, 406,
 454, 491, 493, 494, 501, 506
 master, 26, 402
 novel, 214, 402, 403, 505
 star, 10, 39
 masculinity, 107, 173, 254, 257, 285, 294–6,
 298, 299, 303, 325, 339, 342, 343, 349,
 351–3, 355, 381
 masculinist/patriarchal ideology, 244, 245
 masquerade, 172, 352, 356, 379, 384
Matrix Reloaded, The (2003), 118
Matrix Revolutions, The (2003), 118
Matrix, The (1999), 118
 Matsuo, Akinori, 173, 336
 McDull, 6, 8, 140–146, 149–66, 228, 229
McDull Kung Fu Ding Ding Dong (2009),
 149–54, 229
McDull Prince de la Bun (2004), 143, 155,
 161, 162, 229
McDull, the Alumni (2006), 166
McDull: The Pork of Music (2012), 150, 151,
 153–5, 229
 Media Asia, 24, 25, 35, 44, 68, 380
 melodrama, 39, 67, 175, 247, 284, 286, 369,
 393, 402, 414, 422, 509, 514, 516, 527,
 531, 532, 534
Memories (2002), 432
 memory, 5, 9, 11, 28, 41–3, 53, 134, 158, 161,
 162, 164, 182, 208, 229, 239, 249, 267, 280,
 281, 314, 342, 360, 364, 366, 375, 376, 399,
 401, 407, 451, 484, 493, 495, 496, 501–4,
 507, 508, 511–16, 519, 574, 578, 579, 581
 artificial, 511
 social, 401, 507, 511, 515
 cinematic (*also* screen memory), 280,
 399, 501–4, 508, 511, 578
 collective, 1, 11, 28, 158, 164, 281, 501,
 503, 513–15, 579, 581
 cultural, 37, 42, 43, 53, 60, 61, 161, 208,
 229, 314, 342, 399, 407, 495, 507, 508,
 511, 512

- Mendoza, Brillante, 196
Merry-Go-Round (1956), 530
Merry-Go-Round (2010), 53, 56, 57, 59, 61, 62, 269, 286
Midnight After, The (2014), 89
 migrants, 6, 30–32, 86, 96, 164, 193, 212, 243, 274–6, 284, 285, 287, 288, 290–294, 296–300, 311, 422, 423, 431
 see also emigrants; immigrants
 labor, 212, 285, 291, 297
 masculinity, 294, 298
 Miike, Takashi, 432
 Milky Way Image Company, 26, 42, 228, 380
Millionaire's Express, The (1986), 338
Milocrorze-A Love Story (2011), 197
Miss Kikuko (1956), 171
 mixed realisms, 64
 Mizoguchi, Kenji, 82, 170, 174
 mobility, 20, 28, 40, 55, 56, 78, 82, 84, 154, 155, 243, 273, 285, 290–294, 297–9, 329, 345, 380, 381, 397, 447
 upward, 243, 273, 329, 397
Modern Couple, The (1944), 532
Modern Love Story: Three Equals One Love (1994), 365
 modernism, 210, 220, 221 *see also* postmodernism
 modernity, 6, 10, 23, 29, 31, 55, 76, 77, 81, 85, 175, 209, 210, 213, 216, 243, 293, 366, 375, 491, 503, 504, 507, 508, 511–13, 518, 520, 577, 582, 584 *see also* postmodernity
 Chinese, 29, 209, 213, 293
 Mok, Man-wai, Karen (Karen Joy Morris), 385
Moonlight in Tokyo (2005), 126, 298
More the Merrier, The (1939), 527
Mother (2009), 204
Moving Home (1998), 467, 477–9
 MP&GI, 75, 76, 170, 173–5, 177, 230, 507
Mr. Cinema (2007), 507, 514
Mr. Smith Goes to Washington (1939), 2
Mr. Vampire (1985), 97, 101
 MTV, 237, 450
 Mui, Yim-fong, Anita, 10, 341, 342, 349–57, 363, 381, 382, musical, 10, 21, 36, 343, 363, 404, 426, 440, 441, 445, 448, 449, 451, 454, 455, 458, 494, 506, 508, 527–30, 535, 553, 581, 582
My Life as McDull (2001), 141–6, 149, 152, 155, 157, 159, 228
My Son (1969), 336, 338
Myriad of Colors (1943), 527, 528
 Na, Hong-jin, 198
 nation, 5, 8, 9, 22, 30, 54, 71–4, 77, 81, 82, 84, 91, 116–19, 128, 131, 153, 159, 172, 187, 189, 198, 199, 208, 220, 242–4, 246, 259, 269, 284, 285, 289, 290, 297, 298, 308, 310, 311, 315, 318, 320, 333, 352, 364, 365, 369, 370, 372, 373, 375, 376, 502, 503, 518, 519, 555, 579
 nation state, 71, 72, 74, 77, 82, 311
 national, 3, 5, 7–9, 23, 28, 32–4, 39, 51, 52, 72–4, 76, 77, 79, 81–5, 93, 94, 98, 99, 101, 105, 106, 108, 110, 116–18, 123, 125, 129, 130, 133, 135, 146, 150, 152, 155, 189, 192, 210, 221, 228, 241, 243, 244, 284, 285, 288, 297, 315, 316, 320, 324, 333, 336, 337, 359, 360, 365, 369, 372, 373, 375, 376, 381, 419, 429, 431–3, 457, 458, 491, 501, 502, 514, 520, 566, 578, 580–582
 allegory, 320, 501
 anti-national education, 106
 borders, 130, 244, 359, 365
 cinema, 82, 84, 93, 94, 116–18, 324, 369, 433, 491
 education, 106, 152
 identity, 84, 85, 123, 241, 333, 381, 502, 514
 language, 77, 91, 210
 politics, 129
 National People's Congress, 146, 566
 nationalism, 10, 19, 21, 26, 77, 79, 81, 86, 124, 208, 210, 212, 221, 226, 244, 260, 299, 307–9, 346, 360, 375, 412, 419, 518, 525
 Chinese, 19, 244, 307, 308, 360
 cultural, 412, 419
 ethno-nationalism, 210, 307

- nationalist, 8, 22, 26, 71, 73, 77, 79, 80, 83,
 84, 86, 129, 136, 143, 211, 227, 298,
 308, 313, 320, 333, 375, 419, 422, 484,
 504, 526–8, 532, 535
 ideology, 73, 77, 86, 129, 211, 504
 Nationalist government, 79, 526, 528, 532
 nationality, 74, 85, 86, 212, 254, 292,
 503, 579
 nationalization, 2, 33, 34, 117
 nationhood, 371, 372, 466, 519
Needing You... (2000), 380
 neoliberalism, 2, 55, 66, 92–4, 100, 102,
 104, 285, 288–90, 292, 298, 426, 581
 China and neoliberalism, 94, 100,
 288–90, 295, 298
 neoliberal masculinity, 298
 neoliberal politics, 92
 newsreel, 541, 543, 555
 Ng, Chun-yu, Francis, 134, 385
 Ng, Kwan-yu, Sandra, 63, 254, 385, 399
 Ng, See-yuen, 25, 560
Night and Fog (2009), 64, 202, 239, 241,
 246–8, 250–258, 285, 291–3
Night in Hong Kong, A (1961), 173
 Nikkatsu, 173, 176
Ninbo Fairy, The (1943), 527
92 Legendary La Rose Noire (1992), 403, 506
 Ning, Hao, 26, 119, 202
 Nomura, Yoshitaro, 172
 North/Northern/Northerner, 75, 76, 198,
 199, 208, 211, 220, 226, 320
 North–South divide/dichotomy, 75–7
 nostalgia, 1, 3, 10, 11, 18, 41, 53–6, 58–62,
 64, 67, 68, 81, 100, 161, 162, 268, 269,
 276, 308, 317–19, 342, 391, 392, 396,
 400, 401, 404, 412, 477, 489–94, 501,
 505–8, 510, 511, 513, 515
 cinema/film, 53, 56, 58–62, 64, 67, 68,
 161, 162, 269, 342, 392, 491, 492, 501,
 506–8, 510
 double, 401
Odd Couple, The (1960), 506
Okinawa Rendezvous (2000), 298
Old Boy (2003), 311
On the Northwest Frontline (1938), 543
Once Upon a Time in China (1991), 1, 21
Once Upon a Time in China II (1992), 1, 21, 59
Once Upon a Time in China III (1993), 1, 21
Once Upon a Time in China IV (1993), 1
Once Upon a Time in China V (1994), 1
Once Upon a Time in China VI (1997), 1
 one country, two cinemas, 22
One-Armed Boxer (1972), 325, 333, 334
*One-Armed Chivalry Fights Against One Arm
 Chivalry* (1977), 335
One-Armed Swordsman (1967), 176, 177, 325,
 327–33, 335
One Nite in Mongkok (2004), 285, 291–4
1+1 (2011), 53, 57
 1911 Revolution, 8, 37, 39, 75, 208,
 210, 553
One-Way Street on a Turntable (2007), 463, 554
Ordinary Heroes (1999), 245
Orioles Banished from the Flowers (1948), 491,
 527, 529, 535
 Oscar (Academy Awards), 91, 169, 170
 see also Academy Awards
 Oshii, Mamoru, 373
Overheard (2009), 34, 149
Overheard 2 (2011), 149

Page of History, A (1921–28), 541, 542
 Pan, Di-hua, Rebecca, 403
 Pan, Lei, 332
 Pan-Asian Cinema, 410–412, 414, 419, 430,
 431, 434, 489
 Pang, Chun, Oxide, 27, 126
 Pang, Ho-cheung, 46, 52, 207, 217–19, 230,
 266, 270, 273
 Pang, Phat, Danny, 27, 126
 Pang, Xiaolian, 554
 Park, Chan-wook, 198, 433
 parody/parodic, 59, 62, 140, 152, 218,
 345, 369, 374, 393, 403, 505–7, 510,
 514, 578
 pastiche, 58, 62, 272, 280, 454, 455, 508
 patriarchy, 244, 245, 289, 353
 patriarchal, 108, 242, 244, 256, 257, 261, 285,
 291, 293, 339
 patriotic, 160, 217, 242, 259, 314, 317, 334,
 335, 339, 372, 479, 543

- Peking Opera, 216, 344, 346, 347, 380, 384, 404
People/In Searching / 1997 (1998), 468, 480, 481, 483
Perhaps Love (2005), 27, 36, 57, 412
Permanent Residence (2009), 285, 289
 pop star, 62, 153, 359–63, 368, 369, 371, 373, 375, 376, 449, 450
 pop/popular music, 19, 342, 343, 361–3, 370, 554
 porn/pornography, 84, 134, 207, 211, 218, 219, 381
 postcolonial, 1, 6, 9, 56, 58, 93, 191, 238, 245, 291, 295, 309, 395, 484, 503, 504, 508, 572, 577, 578, 580–582, 584 *see also* colonialism
 Hong Kong, 93, 295, 582
 nostalgia, 58
 women, 238, 245
 postcoloniality, 7, 317, 470 *see also* coloniality
Postmodern Life of My Aunt, The (2006), 27, 32, 34, 246, 261
 postmodernism, 2, 3, 221, 238, 365, 507 *see also* modernism
 postmodernity, 207, 208, 216, 221
 precedent, 458, 571, 573–5
Princess Fragrance (1987), 214
Princess Yang, The (1955), 82, 170
Project A II (1987), 71
Promise, The (2005), 125, 412
Protect Diao Yu Dao Movement (1971), 550
Protecting Siyi (1938), 543
 psychogeography, 155, 157, 158, 225
Public Toilet (2003), 286

Quattro Hong Kong 2 (2011), 196
Queen's Bench III (1990), 560
Queen's Ransom (1976), 338
 queer, 6, 9, 247, 257, 267, 285–91, 293, 295, 299, 303, 342, 345, 346, 348, 349, 353–6, 364–8, 370, 372 *see also* gender; sexuality
 domesticity, 284–6, 288, 290, 291, 299
 time and space, 364–6, 368
 quotidian, 7, 53, 58, 59, 62, 64, 66, 67, 95, 96, 98, 101, 103, 105, 106, 250, 470
 race, 79, 81, 127, 160, 208, 210, 211, 221, 238, 243, 245, 284, 292, 295, 381, 540
 Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK), 144, 145, 464, 540, 547–9, 555, 583
Rainbow as You Wish (1953), 530
Rapid Fire (1992), 309, 310
Rashomon (1950), 169
 Ratanaruang, Pen-Ek, 200, 202
Red Cliff (2008), 32, 34, 117, 380
 regionalism, 8, 123, 124, 136, 435
 regionalization, 117, 125–7, 169, 413
 reinvention, 7, 23, 28, 29, 32, 33, 43, 433, 506, 579
 renationalization, 7, 22, 26, 33, 34, 39, 53, 141, 155, 165, 229
 cultural, 7, 22, 26, 33, 34, 39
Report to the Gods (1967), 546
Return of the One Armed Swordsman (1969), 330
 rhizome, 155–7
Rice Distribution (2003), 553
Rigor Mortis (2013), 90, 96, 97, 99–101, 105, 106, 111
 Ripley, Arthur, 459
Rising Sun (1980), 551
River, The (1997), 240
 romance, 21, 26, 28, 53, 65, 91, 96, 173, 214, 230, 239, 241, 248, 254, 257, 265–7, 269, 270, 272–4, 277–9, 281, 284, 356, 360, 364–70, 402, 404, 405, 422, 441, 459, 509, 513, 516, 531
 teen/teenage, 279, 516
 May–December, 241, 257
 urban, 21, 53, 265, 266, 269, 281
Romance of Book and Sword (1986), 214
Rose, Rose, I Love You (1993), 506
Rouge (1987), 55, 60, 61, 341, 342, 346, 347, 422, 493
 Ruan, Lingyu, 383, 384

 Salt, Brian, 546
Sausalito (2000), 286
 Scorsese, Martin, 118, 457
 Scott, Ridley, 373
 screen histories, 501, 516, 519
 Scud, 285, 381

- Seaman No.7* (1973), 337
Secret Sunshine (2008), 204
Secret, The (1979), 2, 55
72 Tenants of Prosperity (2010), 392, 514
Sex And Zen: Extreme Ecstasy (2011), 211
 sexuality, 5, 7, 9, 123, 188, 210, 219, 237, 238, 240, 255, 267, 285–7, 292–4, 299, 303, 342–5, 347–9, 351, 354, 356, 552
 see also bisexual; gender; heterosexual; homosexuality; intersexuality; queer
Shanghai 13 (1985), 338
 Shanghai Film Group, 25
 Shanghai Film Media Asia, 24
 Shanghai Film Studios, 33
 Shanghai Media Group, 154
 Shanghai Toonmax Media Co., 154
Shaolin Soccer (2001), 96, 505
 Shaw Brothers, 4, 10, 19, 30, 78, 80–82, 169, 170, 173–7, 180, 181, 183, 193, 199, 228, 230, 323, 325–7, 332, 333, 337, 338, 380, 404, 491, 507, 514, 530, 532, 533
 Shaw, Run Run, 78, 169, 332, 333, 338, 532
Shinjuku Incident (2009), 125, 127, 128, 130, 131, 136, 227, 285, 294, 295, 299
 Shochiku, 177, 180, 191, 530
Shopaholics, The (2006), 227
Show Must Go On, The (1952), 532
Silent War, The (2012), 26, 84
 Sil-Metropole Organisation, 148, 514, 544
Simple Life, A (2012), 27, 35, 111, 117, 119, 217, 239, 246
 Siu, King-lo, Dominica, 548
 Siu, Yam-yam, 218, 219
sixty-nine (1999), 200
So Young (2013), 96
Soccer Clash between South China and the Infantry, The (1934), 542
Song of a Songstress (1948), 527, 529
Song of Love (1944), 527
Song Of The Exile (1990), 55, 126, 239–40, 259, 260, 503, 543
Sorrows of the Forbidden City (1948), 220, 533
Sound of Colors (2003), 380
 South/Southern/Southerner, 199, 208, 211, 220, 226, 320 *see also* North-South Divide
Sparrow (2008), 53, 56, 57, 298
Stagecoach (1939), 2
 star as director, 332, 335
 star charisma, 357
Star of Hong Kong (1963), 173
Starry Is The Night (1988), 245
 State Administration of Press, Publication, Film, Radio and Television (SAPPRFT), 18, 34
 State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television (SARFT), 94, 97, 98, 147, 148
Stewardess, The (2002), 458
Still Life (2006), 30, 31
Storm Under the Sun (2009), 554
 Sum, Din-ha, Lydia, 396
Summer Snow (1995), 246
 Sun, Yat-sen, 37, 71, 210, 212, 410, 419, 517, 541, 553, 556
 Sung, Ho-fai, Francis, 366
 Sung, Ting-Mei, 338
Sword and the Lute, The (1967), 327
Sword of Swords (1968), 330, 331
Sword, The (1971), 324, 325
Swordsman, The (1992), 132, 324, 325, 332, 334
Swordsman III: The East is Red (1993), 366
 Szeto, Wai-man, 543
 Tam, Kar-ming, Patrick, 34, 125, 131, 136, 227, 457
 Tang, Huang, 491
 Tarantino, Quentin, 111, 118, 134, 190, 440
Tattooed Dragon, The (1973), 337
 Teddy Robin, 62
 teleportation, 95
 Television and Entertainment Licensing Authority of Hong Kong (TELA), 134, 138
Temple of the Red Lotus (1965), 325–9, 339
Temple Street (1982), 548
 temporality, 365, 366, 370, 372, 374, 375, 391, 392, 394, 419, 484, 501, 565, 572, 574
Tempting Heart (1999), 298
Terminator 2: Judgment Day (1991), 374
This Gun for Hire (1941), 324
This is Hong Kong (1961), 545, 546, 557
Three, 411, 430, 432–6

- Three Outlaw Samurai* (1964), 177, 178,
 180–182, 327
Three Pearls (1959), 532
 thriller, 19, 20, 26, 28, 38, 42, 173, 285, 294,
 299, 414
Thunder Road (1958), 459
 Ti, Lung, 324, 337, 338
 Tian'anmen, 2, 41, 96, 101, 220, 286, 476,
 502, 539, 548
 Tianyi, 211, 542
 Tien, Feng, 326, 330, 331, 336,
Tiger Boy (1966), 177, 325, 327
Time and Tide (2000), 1
 Ting, Shan-His, 324, 338
To Liv(e) (1992), 517
 To, Kei-fung, Johnnie, 4, 24–7, 42, 53, 84,
 107, 118, 132, 193, 196, 199, 220, 227,
 228, 298, 342, 353, 354, 356, 380, 384,
 503, 560
 To, Man-chak, Chapman, 207, 218
 Toho, 82, 172, 180
Tokyo Hong Kong Honolulu (1963), 173
Tokyo Sonata (2008), 204
 Tong, Kim-ting, 542
 Tong, Shu-shuen, 220
 topographical, 53, 55–8, 64, 65, 67, 159,
 160, 162, 164
 topophilia, 7, 52, 53, 58, 59, 61, 62, 64, 65
Touch of Sin, A (2013), 30, 31
Touch of Zen, A (1971), 30, 192, 194, 204
 Toyoda, Shiro, 82
 traditional Chinese medicine, 412–14,
 417–20, 422, 427, 434, 493, 495
Trail of the Broken Blade, The (1967), 327–9
 translocal, 4, 5, 8, 23, 91, 92, 118, 141, 154,
 155, 164, 165, 229, 413, 422, 489, 491,
 492, 494, 496
 imaginary, 141, 155, 165, 229
 transnational
 capital, 82, 502,
 Chinese film/cinema, 116, 124, 125
 cinema/film studies, 52, 89, 91, 116, 118,
 285, 320
 imagination/imaginary, 5, 20, 31, 164, 582
 influence, 169, 230
 star/stardom, 6, 360, 370, 381, 385, 386
 Trenchard-Smith, Brian, 323
Tricky Master, The (1999), 298
Truth—Final Episode, The (1989), 560
Truth, The (1988), 560
 Tsai, Ming-liang, 202, 240
 Tsang, Chi-wai, Eric, 31, 35, 46, 53, 385,
 392, 416, 421, 422, 514
 Tsang, Tsui-shan, Jessey, 53, 64, 237, 269
 Tse, Lap-man, Brian, 140, 141, 146, 165
 Tse, Ting-fung, Nicholas, 369, 379
 Tsui, Hark, 2, 4, 21, 24, 26, 27, 35, 54, 55,
 59, 119, 197, 199, 214, 286, 349, 350,
 502, 525, 550, 578
 Tung Wah Group of Hospitals, 59, 60, 68
 Tung, Biu, Bill, 396
Turnabout Girl (1956), 371
Turning Point, a.k.a. Laughing Gor: the Movie
 (2009), 514
 Tuttle, Frank, 324
Twin Swords (1965), 325
 2046 (2004), 27, 33, 359, 364, 370–376,
 509–11, 513
Unforgettables, The (1998), 467, 475–7, 482
 United Filmmakers Organisation (UFO), 35
 United Nations, 68, 237, 244
Universal Love (1942), 531, 532, 535
Unwritten Law, The (1985), 560
 urban, 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 21, 28, 30, 35, 36, 51–67,
 76, 101, 102, 117, 157–61, 165, 188,
 189, 191, 194, 225, 232, 248, 254,
 265–71, 273, 275–8, 280, 281, 362, 370,
 391–4, 442, 446, 447, 458, 479, 480,
 491, 492, 502, 507, 509, 514, 520, 521,
 541, 551, 581
 change, 270, 278
 cinema/film, 4, 51, 54, 65, 117, 271, 491,
 502, 507, 509, 512, 520
 development/developmentalism, 53, 59,
 61, 62, 66, 67, 268
 drama, 28, 35
 landscape, 53, 370
 modernity, 55, 491
 renewal, 60, 61, 65, 66, 157, 161, 514
 space, 3, 52, 56, 159, 165, 278, 442, 458
 topography, 7, 54, 59, 64, 66

- Urban Renewal Authority, 56, 63, 267–9, 277, 278
- Usokoi* (2001), 370
- Utopia* (2006), 200, 202
- Valiant Ones, The* (1975), 327
- Venice Film Festival, 169, 170, 174, 189, 194–7, 239
- Vertigo* (1958), 459
- Visible Record, 555, 556
- Vulgaria*, 46, 207, 211, 212, 214, 217–20, 230, 231
- Wachowski Brothers, 118
- Wai, Ka-fai, 125, 133, 193, 227, 228, 342, 353, 354, 356, 380, 384, 392
- Wakasugi, Mitsuo, 174
- Wang Jinlun* (1955), 86
- Wang, Shuo, 213–15, 217, 222, 230
- Wang, Yu, 10, 173, 176, 177, 322–40
- War Effort in Guangzhou, The* (1937), 542, 556
- Warlords, The* (2007), 24, 27, 34–6, 57, 494
- Water Comes Over the Hills From the East* (1965), 544
- Way of Dragon* (1972), 322–4
- Way We Are, The* (2008), 53, 56, 57, 64, 111, 239, 241, 246–52, 254, 255, 496
- We Pictures, 35, 36
- Weerasethakul, Apichatpong, 196, 200, 202
- Wei, Shiyu, Louisa, 237, 554
- Welles, Orson, 251
- Wizard of Oz, The* (1939), 2
- Women's Private Parts* (2000), 552
- Wonders of Oriole* (1946), 528
- Wong, Chau-sang, Anthony, 314, 385, 514
- Wong, Chun-chun, Barbara, 237, 266, 278, 279, 289, 552
- Wong, Faye, 10, 359–76, 403, 441, 442, 444–52, 458, 459, 495
- Wong, Jing, 32, 134, 246, 298
- Wong, Kar-wai, 4, 10, 21, 26, 27, 54, 55, 84, 89, 98, 108, 109, 118, 123, 126, 132, 164, 192, 199, 200, 214, 240, 269, 285, 313, 319, 341, 359, 360, 364, 366–76, 380, 384, 401–4, 440, 448, 451, 457–9, 491, 494, 495, 508, 516, 519, 579
- Wong, Man-chun, Manfred, 53
- Wong, Tai-loi, Taylor, 560
- Wong, Tin-lam, 75, 78, 326, 535
- Wong, Yan-kwai, Yank, 466, 468, 475, 480, 483, 485
- Woo, Yu-sen, John, 4, 29, 30, 32, 34, 37, 117, 118, 226, 244, 332, 341, 380, 503, 549, 578
- World Without Thieves, A* (2004), 494
- Wright, Noni, 546
- Written By* (2009), 227
- Wu Xia (2011), 27, 36, 322, 339
- Wu Yen (2001), 342, 349, 353, 354, 356
- Wu, Yin-cho, Daniel, 128, 129, 554
- Wu, Yonggang, 527, 534
- wuxia, 30, 92, 177, 180, 181, 212, 213, 216, 324–6, 329, 331, 332, 350, 353, 384, 403, 502, 534 *see also* martial arts cinema/film (wuxia pian), 30, 92, 177, 180, 212, 213, 216, 324–6, 329, 331, 332, 353, 384, 502, 534
- Xu, Zheng, 28, 96
- Xue, Xiaolu, 24, 96
- Yam, Kim-fai, 354, 355, 525
- Yam, Tat-wah, Simon, 63, 111, 251, 385
- Yan, Jun, 171, 175
- Yang ± Yin: Gender in Chinese Cinema* (1996), 348, 552
- Yang Kwei Fei* (1962), 174
- Yang, Evan (Yi Wen), 170, 171, 190, 445, 525, 530
- Yau, Ching, 5, 237, 257, 466, 552
- Yau, Lai-to, Herman, 53, 314, 319, 514
- Yee, Tung-sing, Derek, 34, 125–7, 129, 266, 285, 294, 353
- Yellow Earth* (1984), 194
- Yellow Sea, The* (2010), 198
- Yen, Ji-dan, Donnie, 38, 39, 117, 118, 313, 314, 316, 317, 384
- Yeoh, Choo-Kheng, Michelle, 6, 118
- Yeung, Chin-wah, Miriam, 385, 424
- Yeung, Choi-nei, Charlie, 131
- Yeung, Shu-hei, 173
- Yi, Wen *see* Yang, Evan

- Yihua Film Company, 526, 535
Ying E Chi, 552
Yip, Wai-man, Raymond, 53, 111
Yip, Wai-shun, Wilson, 25, 26, 34, 53, 369, 513
Yonfan, 126, 196
Yu, Dong, 34–6, 46, 230
Yue, Man-lok, Shawn, 379
Yueh, Feng, 174, 175, 336
Yuen, Kin-to, Toe, 160, 163
Yuen, Woo-ping, 333
Yung Hwa Motion Picture, 529, 530
Zhang, Jingchu, 251
Zhang, Shichuan, 326, 526
Zhang, Yimou, 24, 32, 194, 213, 312
Zhang, Ziyi, 26, 98, 371, 385
Zhao, Wei, 96
Zhongdian, 528
Zhonglian, 527, 528, 530–532
Zhu, Shilin, 193, 220, 523, 526, 530, 532–5,
581, 582
Zhunzi, 467, 475, 481
Zwart, Harald, 128, 295, 312

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